

Little Dorrit



Charles Dickens

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WORKS
OF
CHARLES DICKENS.
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AND JOHN GILBERT.

LITTLE DORRIT.

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LITTLE DORRIT.

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LITTLE DORRIT.

IN TWO BOOKS.

BOOK THE FIRST.

POVERTY.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

LITTLE DORRIT'S LOVER.

LITTLE DORRIT had not attained her twenty-second birthday without finding a lover. Even in the sallow Marshalsea, the ever young Archer shot off a few featherless arrows now and then from a mouldy bow, and winged a Collegian or two.

Little Dorrit's lover, however, was not a Collegian. He was the sentimental son of a turnkey. His father hoped, in the fulness of time, to leave him the inheritance of an unstained key ; and had from his early youth familiarized him with the duties of his office, and with an ambition to retain the prison-lock in the family. While the succession was yet in abeyance, he assisted his mother in the conduct of a snug tobacco business round the corner of Horsemonger Lane (his father being a non-resident turnkey), which could usually command a neat connection within the College walls.

Years ago, when the object of his affections was wont to sit in her little arm-chair by the high Lodge-fender, Young John (family name, Chivery), a year older than herself, had eyed her with admiring wonder. When he had played with her in the yard, his favorite game had been to counterfeit locking her up in corners, and to counterfeit letting her out for real kisses. When he grew tall enough to peep through the keyhole of the great lock of the main door, he had divers times set down his father's dinner, or supper, to get on as it might on the outer side thereof, while he stood taking cold in one eye by dint of peeping at her through that airy perspective.

If Young John had ever slackened in his truth in the less penetrable days of his boyhood, when youth is prone to wear its boots unlaced and is happily unconscious of digestive organs, he had soon strung it up again and screwed it tight. At nineteen, his hand had inscribed in chalk on that part of the wall which fronted her lodging, on the occasion of her birthday, "Welcome sweet nursling of the Fairies!" At twenty-three, the same hand falteringly presented cigars on Sundays to the Father of the Marshalsea, and Father of the queen of his soul.

Young John was small of stature, with rather weak legs and very weak light hair. One of his eyes (perhaps the eye that used to peep through the keyhole) was also weak, and looked larger than the other, as if it couldn't collect itself. Young John was gentle likewise. But he was great of soul. Poetical, expansive, faithful.

Though too humble before the ruler of his heart to be sanguine, Young John had considered the object of his

attachment in all its lights and shades. Following it out to blissful results, he had descried, without self-commendation, a fitness in it. Say things prospered, and they were united. She, the child of the Marshalsea ; he, the lock-keeper. There was a fitness in that. Say he became a resident turnkey. She would officially succeed to the chamber she had rented so long. There was a beautiful propriety in that. It looked over the wall, if you stood on tiptoe ; and, with a trellis-work of scarlet beans and a canary or so, would become a very Arbor. There was a charming idea in that. Then, being all in all to one another, there was even an appropriate grace in the lock. With the world shut out (except that part of it which would be shut in) ; with its troubles and disturbances only known to them by hearsay, as they would be described by the pilgrims tarrying with them on their way to the Insolvent Shrine ; with the Arbor above, and the Lodge below ; they would glide down the stream of time, in pastoral domestic happiness. Young John drew tears from his eyes by finishing the picture with a tombstone in the adjoining churchyard, close against the prison wall, bearing the following touching inscription : " Sacred to the Memory of JOHN CHIVERY, Sixty years Turnkey, and fifty years Head Turnkey, Of the neighboring Marshalsea, Who departed this life, universally respected, on the thirty-first of December, One thousand eight hundred and eighty-six, Aged eighty-three years. Also of his truly beloved and truly loving wife, AMY, whose maiden name was DORRIT, Who survived his loss not quite forty-eight hours, And who breathed her last in the Marshalsea aforesaid. There she was born, There she lived, There she died."

The Chivery parents were not ignorant of their son's

attachment — indeed it had, on some exceptional occasions, thrown him into a state of mind that had impelled him to conduct himself with irascibility towards the customers, and damage the business — but they, in their turns, had worked it out to desirable conclusions. Mrs. Chivery, a prudent woman, had desired her husband to take notice that their John's prospects of the Lock would certainly be strengthened by an alliance with Miss Dorrit, who had herself a kind of claim upon the College, and was much respected there. Mrs. Chivery had desired her husband to take notice that if, on the one hand, their John had means and a post of trust, on the other hand, Miss Dorrit had family; and that her (Mrs. Chivery's) sentiment was, that two halves made a whole. Mrs. Chivery, speaking as a mother and not as a diplomatist, had then, from a different point of view, desired her husband to recollect that their John had never been strong, and that his love had fretted and worried him enough as it was, without his being driven to do himself a mischief, as nobody couldn't say he wouldn't be if he was crossed. These arguments had so powerfully influenced the mind of Mr. Chivery, who was a man of few words, that he had, on sundry Sunday mornings, given his boy what he termed "a lucky touch," signifying that he considered such commendation of him to Good Fortune, preparatory to his that day declaring his passion and becoming triumphant. But Young John had never taken courage to make the declaration; and it was principally on these occasions that he had returned excited to the tobacco shop, and flown at the customers.

In this affair, as in every other, Little Dorrit herself was the last person considered. Her brother and sister were aware of it, and attained a sort of station by mak-

ing a peg of it on which to air the miserably ragged old fiction of the family gentility. Her sister asserted the family gentility, by flouting the poor swain as he loitered about the prison for glimpses of his dear. Tip asserted the family gentility, and his own, by coming out in the character of the aristocratic brother, and loftily swaggering in the little skittle ground respecting seizures by the scruff of the neck, which there were looming probabilities of some gentleman unknown executing on some little puppy not mentioned. These were not the only members of the Dorrit family who turned it to account. No, no. The Father of the Marshalsea was supposed to know nothing about the matter, of course: his poor dignity could not see so low. But he took the cigars on Sundays, and was glad to get them; and sometimes even condescended to walk up and down the yard with the donor (who was proud and hopeful then), and benignantly to smoke one in his society. With no less readiness and condescension did he receive attentions from Chivery Senior, who always relinquished his arm-chair and newspaper to him, when he came into the Lodge during one of his spells of duty; and who had even mentioned to him, that if he would like at any time after dusk, quietly to step out into the fore-court and take a look at the street, there was not much to prevent him. If he did not avail himself of this latter civility, it was only because he had lost the relish for it; inasmuch as he took everything else he could get, and would say at times, "Extremely civil person; Chivery; very attentive man and very respectful. Young Chivery, too; really almost with a delicate perception of one's position here. A very well-conducted family indeed, the Chiveries. Their behavior gratifies me."

The devoted Young John all this time regarded the family with reverence. He never dreamed of disputing their pretensions, but did homage to the miserable Mumbo Jumbo they paraded. As to resenting any affront from *her* brother, he would have felt, even if he had not naturally been of a most pacific disposition, that to wag his tongue or lift his hand against that sacred gentleman would be an unhallowed act. He was sorry that his noble mind should take offence; still, he felt the fact to be not incompatible with its nobility, and sought to propitiate and conciliate that gallant soul. Her father, a gentleman in misfortune — a gentleman of a fine spirit and courtly manners, who always bore with him — he deeply honored. Her sister, he considered somewhat vain and proud, but a young lady of infinite accomplishments, who could not forget the past. It was an instinctive testimony to Little Dorrit's worth, and difference from all the rest, that the poor young fellow honored and loved her for being simply what she was.

The tobacco business round the corner of Horsemonger Lane was carried on in a rural establishment one story high, which had the benefit of the air from the yards of Horsemonger Lane Jail, and the advantage of a retired walk under the wall of that pleasant establishment. The business was of too modest a character to support a life-size Highlander, but it maintained a little one on a bracket on the door-post, who looked like a fallen Cherub that had found it necessary to take to a kilt.

From the portal thus decorated, one Sunday after an early dinner of baked viands, Young John issued forth on his usual Sunday errand; not empty-handed, but with his offering of cigars. He was neatly attired in a plum-colored coat, with as large a collar of black velvet as his

figure could carry; a silken waistcoat, bedecked with golden sprigs; a chased neckerchief much in vogue at that day, representing a preserve of lilac pheasants on a buff ground; pantaloons so highly decorated with side-stripes, that each leg was a three-stringed lute; and a hat of state, very high and hard. When the prudent Mrs. Chivery perceived that in addition to these adornments her John carried a pair of white kid gloves, and a cane like a little finger-post, surmounted by an ivory hand marshalling him the way that he should go; and when she saw him, in this heavy marching order, turn the corner to the right; she remarked to Mr. Chivery, who was at home at the time, that she thought she knew which way the wind blew.

The Collegians were entertaining a considerable number of visitors that Sunday afternoon, and their Father kept his room for the purpose of receiving presentations. After making the tour of the yard, Little Dorrit's lover with a hurried heart went up-stairs, and knocked with his knuckles at the Father's door.

"Come in, come in!" said a gracious voice. The Father's voice, her father's, the Marshalsea's father's. He was seated in his black velvet cap, with his newspaper, three-and-sixpence accidentally left on the table, and two chairs arranged. Everything prepared for holding his Court.

"Ah, Young John! How do you do, how do you do?"

"Pretty well, I thank you, sir. I hope you are the same."

"Yes, John Chivery; yes. Nothing to complain of."

"I have taken the liberty, sir, of —"

"Eh?" The Father of the Marshalsea always lifted

up his eyebrows at this point, and became amiably distraught and smilingly absent in mind.

"— A few cigars, sir."

"Oh!" (For the moment, excessively surprised.)

"Thank you, Young John, thank you. But really, I am afraid I am too— No? Well then, I will say no more about it. Put them on the mantel-shelf, if you please, Young John. And sit down, sit down. You are not a stranger, John."

"Thank you, sir, I am sure. — Miss;" here Young John turned the great hat round and round upon his left-hand, like a slowly twirling mouse-cage; "Miss Amy quite well, sir?"

"Yes, John, yes; very well. She is out."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, John. Miss Amy is gone for an airing. My young people all go out a good deal. But at their time of life, it's natural, John."

"Very much so, I am sure, sir."

"An airing. An airing. Yes." He was blandly tapping his fingers on the table, and casting his eyes up at the window. "Amy has gone for an airing on the Iron Bridge. She has become quite partial to the Iron Bridge of late, and seems to like to walk there better than anywhere." He returned to conversation. "Your father is not on duty at present, I think, John?"

"No, sir, he comes on later in the afternoon." Another twirl of the great hat, and then Young John said, rising, "I am afraid I must wish you good day, sir."

"So soon? Good day, Young John. Nay, nay," with the utmost condescension, "never mind your glove, John. Shake hands with it on. You are no stranger here, you know."

Highly gratified by the kindness of his reception, Young John descended the staircase. On his way down he met some Collegians bringing up visitors to be presented, and at that moment Mr. Dorrit happened to call over the bannisters with particular distinctness, "Much obliged to you for your little testimonial, John!"

Little Dorrit's lover very soon laid down his penny on the toll-plate of the Iron Bridge, and came upon it looking about him for the well-known and well-beloved figure. At first he feared she was not there; but as he walked on towards the Middlesex side, he saw her standing still, looking at the water. She was absorbed in thought, and he wondered what she might be thinking about. There were the piles of city roofs and chimneys, more free from smoke than on week-days; and there were the distant masts and steeples. Perhaps she was thinking about them.

Little Dorrit mused so long, and was so entirely pre-occupied, that although her lover stood quiet for what he thought was a long time, and twice or thrice retired and came back again to the former spot, still she did not move. So, in the end, he made up his mind to go on, and seem to come upon her casually in passing, and speak to her. The place was quiet, and now or never was the time to speak to her.

He walked on, and she did not appear to hear his steps until he was close upon her. When he said "Miss Dorrit!" she started and fell back from him, with an expression in her face of fright and something like dislike that caused him unutterable dismay. She had often avoided him before — always, indeed, for a long, long while. She had turned away and glided off, so often, when she had seen him coming towards her, that the un-

fortunate Young John could not think it accidental. But he had hoped that it might be shyness, her retiring character, her foreknowledge of the state of his heart, anything short of aversion. Now, that momentary look had said, "You, of all people! I would rather have seen any one on earth, than you!"

It was but a momentary look, inasmuch as she checked it, and said in her soft little voice, "Oh, Mr. John! Is it you?" But she felt what it had been, as he felt what it had been; and they stood looking at one another equally confused.

"Miss Amy, I am afraid I disturbed you by speaking to you."

"Yes, rather. I—I came here to be alone, and I thought I was."

"Miss Amy, I took the liberty of walking this way, because Mr. Dorrit chanced to mention, when I called upon him just now, that you—"

She caused him more dismay than before by suddenly murmuring, "O, father, father!" in a heart-rending tone, and turning her face away.

"Miss Amy, I hope I don't give you any uneasiness by naming Mr. Dorrit. I assure you I found him very well, and in the best of spirits, and he showed me even more than his usual kindness; being so very kind as to say that I was not a stranger there, and in all ways gratifying me very much."

To the inexpressible consternation of her lover, Little Dorrit, with her hands to her averted face, and rocking herself where she stood, as if she were in pain, murmured, "O, father, how can you! O dear, dear father, how can you, can you, do it!"

The poor fellow stood gazing at her, overflowing with

sympathy, but not knowing what to make of this, until, having taken out her handkerchief and put it to her still averted face, she hurried away. At first he remained stock still; then hurried after her.

"Miss Amy, pray! Will you have the goodness to stop a moment. Miss Amy, if it comes to that, let *me* go. I shall go out of my senses, if I have to think that I have driven you away like this."

His trembling voice and unfeigned earnestness brought Little Dorrit to a stop. "O, I don't know what to do," she cried, "I don't know what to do!"

To Young John, who had never seen her bereft of her quiet self-command, who had seen her from her infancy ever so reliable and self-suppressed, there was a shock in her distress, and in having to associate himself with it as its cause, that shook him from his great hat to the pavement. He felt it necessary to explain himself. He might be misunderstood — supposed to mean something, or to have done something, that had never entered into his imagination. He begged her to hear him explain himself, as the greatest favor she could show him.

"Miss Amy, I know very well that your family is far above mine. It were vain to conceal it. There never was a Chivery a gentleman that ever I heard of, and I will not commit the meanness of making a false representation on a subject so momentous. Miss Amy, I know very well that your high-souled brother, and likewise your spirited sister, spurn me from a heighth. What I have to do is to respect them, to wish to be admitted to their friendship, to look up at the eminence on which they are placed, from my lowlier station — for, whether viewed as tobacco or viewed as the lock, I well know it is lowly — and ever wish them well and happy."

There really was a genuineness in the poor fellow, and a contrast between the hardness of his hat and the softness of his heart (albeit, perhaps, of his head, too), that was moving. Little Dorrit entreated him to disparage neither himself nor his station, and, above all things, to divest himself of any idea that she supposed hers to be superior. This gave him a little comfort.

"Miss Amy," he then stammered, "I have had for a long time — ages they seem to me — Revolving ages — a heart-cherished wish to say something to you. May I say it?"

Little Dorrit involuntarily started from his side again, with the faintest shadow of her former look; conquering that, she went on at great speed half across the Bridge without replying.

"May I — Miss Amy, I but ask the question humbly — may I say it? I have been so unlucky already in giving you pain, without having any such intentions, before the holy Heavens! that there is no fear of my saying it unless I have your leave. I can be miserable alone, I can be cut up by myself; why should I also make miserable and cut up one, that I would fling myself off that parapet to give half a moment's joy to! Not that that's much to do, for I'd do it for two-pence."

The mournfulness of his spirits, and the gorgeousness of his appearance, might have made him ridiculous, but that his delicacy made him respectable. Little Dorrit learnt from it what to do.

"If you please, John Chivery," she returned, trembling, but in a quiet way, "since you are so considerate as to ask me whether you shall say any more — if you please, no."

"Never, Miss Amy?"

"No, if you please. Never."

"O Lord!" gasped Young John.

"But perhaps, you will let me, instead, say something to you. I want to say it earnestly, and with as plain a meaning as it is possible to express. When you think of us, John — I mean my brother and sister, and me — don't think of us as being any different from the rest; for, whatever we once were (which I hardly know) we ceased to be long ago, and never can be any more. It will be much better for you, and much better for others, if you will do that, instead of what you are doing now."

Young John dolefully protested that he would try to bear it in mind, and would be heartily glad to do anything she wished.

"As to me," said Little Dorrit, "think as little of me as you can; the less, the better. When you think of me at all, John, let it only be as the child you have seen grow up in the prison, with one set of duties always occupying her; as a weak, retired, contented, unprotected girl. I particularly want you to remember, that when I come outside the gate, I am unprotected and solitary."

He would try to do anything she wished. But why did Miss Amy so much want him to remember that?

"Because," returned Little Dorrit, "I know I can then quite trust you not to forget to-day, and not to say any more to me. You are so generous that I know I can trust to you for that; and I do, and I always will. I am going to show you, at once, that I fully trust you. I like this place where we are speaking, better than any place I know;" her slight color had faded, but her lover thought he saw it coming back just then; "and I may

be often here. I know it is only necessary for me to tell you so, to be quite sure that you will never come here again in search of me. And I am — quite sure ! ”

She might rely upon it, said Young John. He was a miserable wretch, but her word was more than a law for him.

“ And good-by, John,” said Little Dorrit. “ And I hope you will have a good wife one day, and be a happy man. I am sure you deserve to be happy, and you will be, John.”

As she held out her hand to him with these words, the heart that was under the waistcoat of sprigs — mere slop-work, if the truth must be known — swelled to the size of the heart of a gentleman ; and the poor common little fellow having no room to hold it, burst into tears.

“ O don’t cry ; ” said Little Dorrit piteously. “ Don’t, don’t ! Good-by, John. God bless you ! ”

“ Good-by, Miss Amy. Good-by ! ”

And so he left her : first observing that she sat down on the corner of a seat, and not only rested her little hand upon the rough wall, but laid her face against it too, as if her head were heavy, and her mind were sad.

It was an affecting illustration of the fallacy of human projects, to behold her lover with the great hat pulled over his eyes, the velvet collar turned up as if it rained, the plum-colored coat buttoned to conceal the silken waistcoat of golden sprigs, and the little direction-post pointing inexorably home, creeping along by the worst back-streets, and composing as he went, the following new inscription for a tombstone in Saint George’s Churchyard :

“ Here lie the mortal remains of JOHN CHIVERY,

Never anything worth mentioning, Who died about the end of the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, Of a broken heart, Requesting with his last breath that the word AMY might be inscribed over his ashes, Which was accordingly directed to be done, By his afflicted Parents."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FATHER OF THE MARSHALSEA IN TWO OR THREE
RELATIONS.

THE brothers William and Frederick Dorrit, walking up and down the College-yard — of course on the aristocratic or Pump side, for the Father made it a point of his state to be chary of going among his children on the Poor side, except on Sunday mornings, Christmas Days, and other occasions of ceremony, in the observance whereof he was very punctual, and at which times he laid his hand upon the heads of their infants, and blessed those young Insolvents with a benignity that was highly edifying — the brothers, walking up and down the College-yard together, were a memorable sight. Frederick the free, was so humbled, bowed, withered, and faded; William the bond, was so courtly, condescending, and benevolently conscious of a position; that in this regard only, if in no other, the brothers were a spectacle to wonder at.

They walked up and down the yard, on the evening of Little Dorrit's Sunday interview with her lover on the Iron Bridge. The cares of state were over for that day, the Drawing Room had been well attended, several new presentations had taken place, the three-and-sixpence accidentally left on the table had accidentally increased to twelve shillings, and the Father of the Marshalsea re-

freshed himself with a whiff of cigar. As he walked up and down, affably accommodating his step to the shuffle of his brother, not proud in his superiority, but considerate of that poor creature, bearing with him, and breathing toleration of his infirmities in every little puff of smoke that issued from his lips and aspired to get over the spiked wall, he was a sight to wonder at.

His brother Frederick of the dim eye, palsied hand, bent form, and groping mind, submissively shuffled at his side, accepting his patronage as he accepted every incident of the labyrinthian world in which he had got lost. He held the usual screwed bit of whity-brown paper in his hand, from which he ever and again unscrewed a spare pinch of snuff. That falteringly taken, he would glance at his brother not unadmirably, put his hands behind him, and shuffle on so at his side until he took another pinch, or stood still to look about him — perchance suddenly missing his clarionet.

The College visitors were melting away as the shades of night drew on, but the yard was still pretty full, the Collegians being mostly out, seeing their friends to the Lodge. As the brothers paced the yard, William the bond looked about him to receive salutes, returned them by graciously lifting off his hat, and, with an engaging air, prevented Frederick the free from running against the company, or being jostled against the wall. The Collegians as a body were not easily impressible, but even they, according to their various ways of wondering, appeared to find in the two brothers a sight to wonder at.

"You are a little low this evening, Frederick," said the Father of the Marshalsea. "Anything the matter?"

"The matter?" He stared for a moment, and then

dropped his head and eyes again. "No, William, no. Nothing is the matter."

"If you could be persuaded to smarten yourself up a little, Frederick" —

"Ay, ay!" said the old man, hurriedly. "But I can't be. I can't be. Don't talk so. That's all over."

The Father of the Marshalsea glanced at a passing Collegian with whom he was on friendly terms, as who should say, "An enfeebled old man, this; but he is my brother, sir, my brother, and the voice of Nature is potent!" and steered his brother clear of the handle of the pump by the threadbare sleeve. Nothing would have been wanting to the perfection of his character as a fraternal guide, philosopher, and friend, if he had only steered his brother clear of ruin, instead of bringing it upon him.

"I think, William," said the object of his affectionate consideration, "that I am tired, and will go home to bed."

"My dear Frederick," returned the other. "Don't let me detain you; don't sacrifice your inclinations to me."

"Late hours, and a heated atmosphere, and years, I suppose," said Frederick, "weaken me."

"My dear Frederick," returned the Father of the Marshalsea, "do you think you are sufficiently careful of yourself? Do you think your habits are as precise and methodical as — shall I say as mine are? Not to revert again to that little eccentricity which I mentioned just now, I doubt if you take air and exercise enough, Frederick. Here is the parade, always at your service. Why not use it more regularly than you do?"

"Hah!" sighed the other. "Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"But it is of no use saying yes yes, my dear Frederick," the Father of the Marshalsea in his mild wisdom persisted, "unless you act on that assent. Consider my case, Frederick. I am a kind of example. Necessity and time have taught me what to do. At certain stated hours of the day, you will find me on the parade, in my room, in the Lodge, reading the paper, receiving company, eating and drinking. I have impressed upon Amy during many years, that I must have my meals (for instance) punctually. Amy has grown up in a sense of the importance of these arrangements, and you know what a good girl she is."

The brother only sighed again, as he plodded dreamily along, "Hah! Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"My dear fellow," said the Father of the Marshalsea, laying his hand upon his shoulder, and mildly rallying him — mildly, because of his weakness, poor dear soul; "you said that before, and it does not express much, Frederick, even if it means much. I wish I could rouse you, my good Frederick; you want to be roused."

"Yes, William, yes. No doubt," returned the other, lifting his dim eyes to his face. "But I am not like you."

The Father of the Marshalsea said, with a shrug of modest self-depreciation, "Oh! You might be like me, my dear Frederick; you might be, if you chose!" and forbore, in the magnanimity of his strength, to press his fallen brother further.

There was a deal of leave-taking going on in corners, as was usual on Sunday nights; and here and there in the dark, some poor woman, wife or mother, was weeping with a new Collegian. The time had been when the Father himself had wept, in the shades of that yard, as

his own poor wife had wept. But it was many years ago; and now he was like a passenger aboard ship on a long voyage, who has recovered from sea-sickness, and is impatient of that weakness in the fresher passengers taken aboard at the last port. He was inclined to remonstrate, and to express his opinion that people who couldn't get on without crying, had no business there. In manner, if not in words, he always testified his displeasure of these interruptions of the general harmony; and it was so well understood, that delinquents usually withdrew if they were aware of him.

On this Sunday evening, he accompanied his brother to the gate with an air of endurance and clemency; being in a bland temper and graciously disposed to overlook the tears. In the flaring gaslight of the Lodge, several Collegians were basking: some taking leave of visitors, and some who had no visitors, watching the frequent turning of the key, and conversing with one another and with Mr. Chivery. The paternal entrance made a sensation of course; and Mr. Chivery, touching his hat (in a short manner, though) with his key, hoped he found himself tolerable.

"Thank you, Chivery, quite well. And you?"

Mr. Chivery said in a low growl, "O! *he* was all right." Which was his general way of acknowledging inquiries after his health, when a little sullen.

"I had a visit from Young John to-day, Chivery. And very smart he looked, I assure you."

So Mr. Chivery had heard. Mr. Chivery must confess, however, that his wish was that the boy didn't lay out so much money upon it. For what did it bring him in? It only brought him in Wexation. And he could get that anywhere, for nothing.

"How vexation, Chivery?" asked the benignant father.

"No odds," returned Mr. Chivery. "Never mind. Mr. Frederick going out?"

"Yes, Chivery, my brother is going home to bed. He is tired, and not quite well. Take care, Frederick, take care. Good night, my dear Frederick!"

Shaking hands with his brother, and touching his greasy hat to the company in the Lodge, Frederick slowly shuffled out of the door which Mr. Chivery unlocked for him. The Father of the Marshalsea showed the amiable solicitude of a superior being that he should come to no harm.

"Be so kind as to keep the door open a moment, Chivery, that I may see him go along the passage and down the steps. Take care, Frederick! (He is very infirm.) Mind the steps! (He is so very absent.) Be careful how you cross, Frederick. (I really don't like the notion of his going wandering at large, he is so extremely liable to be run over.)"

With these words, and with a face expressive of many uneasy doubts and much anxious guardianship, he turned his regards upon the assembled company in the Lodge: so plainly indicating that his brother was to be pitied for not being under lock and key, that an opinion to that effect went round among the Collegians assembled.

But he did not receive it with unqualified assent; on the contrary, he said, No, gentlemen, no; let them not misunderstand him. His brother Frederick was much broken, no doubt, and it might be more comfortable to himself (the Father of the Marshalsea) to know that he was safe within the walls. Still, it must be remembered that to support an existence there during many years,

required a certain combination of qualities — he did not say high qualities, but qualities — moral qualities. Now, had his brother Frederick that peculiar union of qualities? Gentlemen, he was a most excellent man, a most gentle, tender, and estimable man, with the simplicity of a child; but would he, though unsuited for most other places, do for that place? No; he said confidently, no! And, he said, Heaven forbid that Frederick should be there in any other character than in his present voluntary character! Gentlemen, whoever came to that College, to remain there a length of time, must have strength of character to go through a good deal and to come out of a good deal. Was his beloved brother Frederick that man? No. They saw him, even as it was, crushed. Misfortune crushed him. He had not power of recoil enough, not elasticity enough, to be a long time in such a place, and yet preserve his self-respect and feel conscious that he was a gentleman. Frederick had not (if he might use the expression) Power enough to see in any delicate little attentions and — and — Testimonials that he might under such circumstances receive, the goodness of human nature, the fine spirit animating the Collegians as a community, and at the same time no degradation to himself, and no depreciation of his claims as a gentleman. Gentlemen, God bless you!

Such was the homily with which he improved and pointed the occasion to the company in the Lodge, before turning into the sallow yard again, and going with his own poor shabby dignity past the Collegian in the dressing-gown who had no coat, and past the Collegian in the sea-side slippers who had no shoes, and past the stout greengrocer Collegian in the corduroy knee-breeches who had no cares, and past the lean clerk Collegian in but-

tonless black who had no hopes, up his own poor shabby staircase, to his own poor shabby room.

There, the table was laid for his supper, and his old gray gown was ready for him on his chair-back at the fire. His daughter put her little prayer-book in her pocket — had she been praying for pity on all prisoners and captives! — and rose to welcome him.

Uncle had gone home, then? she asked him, as she changed his coat and gave him his black velvet cap. Yes, uncle had gone home. Had her father enjoyed his walk? Why, not much, Amy; not much. No? Did he not feel quite well?

As she stood behind him, leaning over his chair so lovingly, he looked with downcast eyes at the fire. An uneasiness stole over him that was like a touch of shame; and when he spoke, as he presently did, it was in an unconnected and embarrassed manner.

"Something, I — hem! — I don't know what, has gone wrong with Chivery. He is not — ha! — not nearly so obliging and attentive as usual to-night. It — hem! — it's a little thing, but it puts me out, my love. It's impossible to forget," turning his hands over and over, and looking closely at them, "that — hem! — that in such a life as mine, I am unfortunately dependent on these men for something, every hour in the day."

Her arm was on his shoulder, but she did not look in his face while he spoke. Bending her head, she looked another way.

"I — hem! — I can't think, Amy, what has given Chivery offence. He is generally so — so very attentive and respectful. And to-night he was quite — quite short with me. Other people there too! Why, good Heaven! if I was to lose the support and recognition of

Chivery and his brother officers, I might starve to death here."

While he spoke, he was opening and shutting his hands like valves; so conscious all the time of that touch of shame, that he shrunk before his own knowledge of his meaning.

"I — ha! — I can't think what it's owing to. I am sure I cannot imagine what the cause of it is. There was a certain Jackson here once, a turnkey of the name of Jackson (I don't think you can remember him, my dear, you were very young), and — hem! — and he had a — brother, and this — young brother paid his addresses to — at least, did not go so far as to pay his addresses to — but admired — respectfully admired — the — not the daughter, the sister — of one of us; a rather distinguished Collegian; I may say, very much so. His name was Captain Martin; and he consulted me on the question whether it was necessary that his daughter — sister — should hazard offending the turnkey brother by being too — ha! — too plain with the other brother. Captain Martin was a gentleman and a man of honor, and I put it to him first to give me his — his own opinion. Captain Martin (highly respected in the army) then unhesitatingly said, that it appeared to him that his — hem! — sister was not called upon to understand the young man too distinctly, and that she might lead him on — I am doubtful whether lead him on was Captain Martin's exact expression; indeed I think he said tolerate him — on her father's — I should say, brother's — account. I hardly know how I have strayed into this story. I suppose it has been through being unable to account for Chivery; but as to the connection between the two, I don't see —"

His voice died away, as if she could not bear the pain of hearing him, and her hand had gradually crept to his lips. For a little while, there was a dead silence and stillness; and he remained shrunk in his chair, and she remained with her arm round his neck, and her head bowed down upon his shoulder.

His supper was cooking in a saucepan on the fire, and, when she moved, it was to make it ready for him on the table. He took his usual seat, she took hers, and he began his meal. They did not, as yet, look at one another. By little and little he began; laying down his knife and fork with a noise, taking things up sharply, biting at his bread as if he were offended with it, and in other similar ways showing that he was out of sorts. At length he pushed his plate from him, and spoke aloud. With the strangest inconsistency.

"What does it matter whether I eat or starve? What does it matter whether such a blighted life as mine comes to an end, now, next week, or next year? What am I worth to any one? A poor prisoner, fed on alms and broken victuals; a squalid, disgraced wretch!"

"Father, father!" As he rose, she went on her knees to him, and held up her hands to him.

"Amy," he went on in a suppressed voice, trembling violently, and looking at her as wildly as if he had gone mad. "I tell you, if you could see me as your mother saw me, you wouldn't believe it to be the creature you have only looked at through the bars of this cage. I was young, I was accomplished, I was good-looking; I was independent — by God I was, child! — and people sought me out, and envied me. Envied me!"

"Dear father!" She tried to take down the shaking arm that he flourished in the air, but he resisted, and put her hand away.

"If I had but a picture of myself in those days, though it was ever so ill done, you would be proud of it, you would be proud of it. But I have no such thing. Now, let me be a warning! Let no man," he cried, looking haggardly about, "fail to preserve at least that little of the times of his prosperity and respect. Let his children have that clue to what he was. Unless my face, when I am dead, subsides into the long departed look — they say such things happen, I don't know — my children will have never seen me."

"Father, father!"

"O despise me, despise me! Look away from me, don't listen to me, stop me, blush for me, cry for me — Even you, Amy! Do it, do it! I do it to myself! I am hardened now, I have sunk too low to care long even for that."

"Dear father, loved father, darling of my heart!" She was clinging to him with her arms, and she got him to drop into his chair again, and caught at the raised arm, and tried to put it round her neck.

"Let it lie there, father. Look at me, father, kiss me, father! Only think of me, father, for one little moment!"

Still he went on in the same wild way, though it was gradually breaking down into a miserable whining.

"And yet I have some respect here. I have made some stand against it. I am not quite trodden down. Go out and ask who is the chief person in the place. They'll tell you it's your father. Go out and ask who is never trifled with, and who is always treated with some

delicacy. They'll say, your father. Go out and ask what funeral here (it must be here, I know it can be nowhere else) will make more talk, and perhaps more grief, than any that has ever gone out at the gate. They'll say your father's. Well then. Amy! Amy! Is your father so universally despised? Is there nothing to redeem him? Will you have nothing to remember him by, but his ruin and decay? Will you be able to have no affection for him when he is gone, poor cast-away, gone?"

He burst into tears of maudlin pity for himself, and at length suffering her to embrace him, and take charge of him, let his gray head rest against her cheek, and bewailed his wretchedness. Presently he changed the subject of his lamentations, and clasping his hands about her as she embraced him, cried, O Amy, his motherless, forlorn child! O the days that he had seen her careful and laborious for him! Then he reverted to himself, and weakly told her how much better she would have loved him if she had known him in his vanished character, and how he would have married her to a gentleman who should have been proud of her as his daughter, and how (at which he cried again) she should first have ridden at his fatherly side on her own horse, and how the crowd (by which he meant in effect the people who had given him the twelve shillings he then had in his pocket) should have trudged the dusty roads respectfully.

Thus, now boasting, now despairing, in either fit a captive with the jail-rot upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into the grain of his soul, he revealed his degenerate state to his affectionate child. No one else ever beheld him in the details of his humiliation. Little recked the Collegians who were laughing in their rooms

over his late address in the Lodge, what a serious picture they had in their obscure gallery of the Marshalsea that Sunday night.

There was a classical daughter once — perhaps — who ministered to her father in his prison as her mother had ministered to her. Little Dorrit, though of the unheroic modern stock, and mere English, did much more in comforting her father's wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned, through all his years of famine.

She soothed him ; asked him for his forgiveness if she had been, or seemed to have been, undutiful ; told him, Heaven knows truly, that she could not honor him more if he were the favorite of Fortune and the whole world acknowledged him. When his tears were tried, and he sobbed in his weakness no longer, and was free from that touch of shame, and had recovered his usual bearing, she prepared the remains of his supper afresh, and, sitting by his side, rejoiced to see him eat and drink. For, now he sat in his black velvet cap and old gray gown, magnanimous again ; and would have comported himself towards any Collegian who might have looked in to ask his advice, like the great moral Lord Chesterfield, or Master of the ethical ceremonies of the Marshalsea.

To keep his attention engaged, she talked with him about his wardrobe ; when he was pleased to say, that Yes, indeed, those shirts she proposed would be exceedingly acceptable, for those he had were worn out, and, being ready-made, had never fitted him. Being conversational and in a reasonable flow of spirits, he then invited her attention to his coat as it hung behind the door : remarking that the Father of the place would set an in-

different example to his children, already disposed to be slovenly, if he went among them out at elbows. He was jocular, too, as to the heeling of his shoes; but became grave on the subject of his cravat, and promised her that when she could afford it, she should buy him a new one.

While he smoked out his cigar in peace, she made his bed, and put the small room in order for his repose. Being weary then, owing to the advanced hour and his emotions, he came out of his chair to bless her and wish her Good night. All this time he had never once thought of *her* dress, her shoes, her need of anything. No other person upon earth, save herself, could have been so unmindful of her wants.

He kissed her many times with "Bless you, my love. Good night, my dear!"

But her gentle breast had been so deeply wounded by what she had seen of him, that she was unwilling to leave him alone, lest he should lament and despair again. "Father, dear, I am not tired; let me come back presently, when you are in bed, and sit by you."

He asked her with an air of protection, if she felt solitary?

"Yes, father."

"Then come back by all means, my love."

"I shall be very quiet, father."

"Don't think of me, my dear," he said, giving her his kind permission fully. "Come back by all means."

He seemed to be dozing when she returned, and she put the low fire together very softly lest she should awake him. But he overheard her, and called out who was that?

"Only Amy, father."

"Amy, my child, come here. I want to say a word to you."

He raised himself a little in his low bed, as she kneeled beside it to bring her face near him; and put his hand between hers. O! Both the private father, and the Father of the Marshalsea were strong within him then.

"My love, you have had a life of hardship here. No companions, no recreations, many cares I am afraid?"

"Don't think of that, dear. I never do."

"You know my position, Amy. I have not been able to do much for you; but all I have been able to do, I have done."

"Yes, my dear father," she rejoined, kissing him. "I know, I know."

"I am in the twenty-third year of my life here," he said, with a catch in his breath that was not so much a sob as an irrepressible sound of self-approval, the momentary outburst of a noble consciousness. "It is all I could do for my children — I have done it. Amy, my love, you are by far the best loved of the three; I have had you principally in my mind—whatever I have done for your sake, my dear child, I have done freely and without murmuring."

Only the wisdom that holds the clue to all hearts and all mysteries, can surely know to what extent a man, especially a man brought down as this man had been, can impose upon himself. Enough, for the present place, that he lay down with wet eyelashes, serene, in a manner majestic, after bestowing his life of degradation as a sort of portion on the devoted child upon whom its miseries had fallen so heavily, and whose love alone had saved him to be even what he was.

That child had no doubts, asked herself no questions, for she was but too content to see him with a lustre round his head. Poor dear, good dear, truest, kindest, dearest, were the only words she had for him, as she hushed him to rest.

She never left him all that night. As if she had done him a wrong which her tenderness could hardly repair, she sat by him in his sleep, at times softly kissing him with suspended breath, and calling him in a whisper by some endearing name. At times she stood aside, so as not to intercept the low firelight, and, watching him when it fell upon his sleeping face, wondered did he look now at all as he had looked when he was prosperous and happy; as he had so touched her by imagining that he might look once more in that awful time. At the thought of that time, she kneeled beside his bed again, and prayed "O spare his life! O save him to me! O look down upon my dear, long-suffering, unfortunate, much-changed, dear dear father!"

Not until the morning came to protect him and encourage him, did she give him a last kiss and leave the small room. When she had stolen down-stairs, and along the empty yard, and had crept up to her own high garret, the smokeless housetops and the distant country hills were discernible over the wall in the clear morning. As she gently opened the window, and looked eastward down the prison-yard, the spikes upon the wall were tipped with red, then made a sullen purple pattern on the sun as it came flaming up into the heavens. The spikes had never looked so sharp and cruel, nor the bars so heavy, nor the prison space so gloomy and contracted. She thought of the sunrise on rolling rivers, of the sunrise on wide seas, of the sunrise on rich landscapes, of the sunrise on great

forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling; and she looked down into the living grave on which the sun had risen, with her father in it, three-and-twenty years, and said, in a burst of sorrow and compassion, "No, no, I have never seen him in my life!"

CHAPTER XX.

MOVING IN SOCIETY.

IF Young John Chivery had had the inclination, and the power, to write a satire on family pride, he would have had no need to go for an avenging illustration out of the family of his beloved. He would have found it amply in that gallant brother and that dainty sister, so steeped in mean experiences, and so loftily conscious of the family name ; so ready to beg or borrow from the poorest, to eat of anybody's bread, spend anybody's money, drink from anybody's cup and break it afterwards. To have painted the sordid facts of their lives, and they throughout invoking the death's head apparition of the family gentility to come and scare their benefactors, would have made Young John a satirist of the first water.

Tip had turned his liberty to hopeful account by becoming a billiard-marker. He had troubled himself so little as to the means of his release, that Clennam scarcely needed to have been at the pains of impressing the mind of Mr. Plornish on that subject. Whoever had paid him the compliment, he very readily accepted the compliment with *his* compliments, and there was an end of it. Issuing forth from the gate on these easy terms, he became a billiard-marker ; and now occasionally looked in at the little skittle-ground in a green New-

market coat (second hand), with a shining collar and bright buttons (new), and drank the beer of the Collegians.

One solid stationary point in the looseness of this gentleman's character, was, that he respected and admired his sister Amy. The feeling had never induced him to spare her a moment's uneasiness, or to put himself to any restraint or inconvenience on her account; but, with that Marshalsea taint upon his love, he loved her. The same rank Marshalsea flavor was to be recognized in his distinctly perceiving that she sacrificed her life to her father, and in his having no idea that she had done anything for himself.

When this spirited young man, and his sister, had begun systematically to produce the family skeleton for the overawing of the College, this narrative cannot precisely state. Probably at about the period when they began to dine on the College charity. It is certain that the more reduced and necessitous they were, the more pompously the skeleton emerged from its tomb; and that when there was anything particularly shabby in the wind, the skeleton always came out with the ghastliest flourish.

Little Dorrit was late on the Monday morning, for her father slept late, and afterwards there was his breakfast to prepare and his room to arrange. She had no engagement to go out to work, however, and therefore stayed with him until, with Maggy's help, she had put everything right about him, and had seen him off upon his morning walk (of twenty yards or so) to the coffee-house to read the paper. She then got on her bonnet and went out; having been anxious to get out much sooner. There was, as usual, a cessation of the small talk in the Lodge as she passed through it; and a Collegian who had come

in on Saturday night, received the intimation from the elbow of a more seasoned Collegian, "Look out. Here she is!"

She wanted to see her sister, but when she got round to Mr. Cripples's she found that both her sister and her uncle had gone to the theatre where they were engaged. Having taken thought of this probability by the way, and having settled that in such case she would follow them, she set off afresh for the theatre, which was on that side of the river, and not very far away.

Little Dorrit was almost as ignorant of the ways of theatres as of the ways of gold mines, and when she was directed to a furtive sort of door, with a curious up-all-night air about it, that appeared to be ashamed of itself and to be hiding in an alley, she hesitated to approach it; being further deterred by the sight of some half dozen close-shaved gentlemen, with their hats very strangely on, who were lounging about the door, looking not at all unlike Collegians. On her applying to them, reassured by this resemblance, for a direction to Miss Dorrit, they made way for her to enter a dark hall — it was more like a great grim lamp gone out than anything else — where she could hear the distant playing of music and the sound of dancing feet. A man so much in want of airing that he had a blue mould upon him, sat watching this dark place from a hole in a corner, like a spider; and he told her that he would send a message up to Miss Dorrit by the first lady or gentleman who went through. The first lady who went through had a roll of music, half in her muff and half out of it, and was in such a tumbled condition altogether, that it seemed as if it would be an act of kindness to iron her. But as she was very good-natured, and said "Come with me; I'll soon

find Miss Dorrit for you," Miss Dorrit's sister went with her, drawing nearer and nearer, at every step she took in the darkness, to the sound of music and the sound of dancing feet.

At last they came into a maze of dust, where a quantity of people were tumbling over one another, and where there was such a confusion of unaccountable shapes of beams, bulkheads, brick walls, ropes, and rollers, and such a mixing of gaslight and daylight, that they seemed to have got on the wrong side of the pattern of the universe. Little Dorrit, left to herself, and knocked against by somebody every moment, was quite bewildered when she heard her sister's voice.

"Why, good gracious, Amy, what ever brought you here!"

"I wanted to see you, Fanny dear; and as I am going out all day to-morrow, and knew you might be engaged all day to-day, I thought" —

"But the idea, Amy, of *you* coming behind! I never did!" As her sister said this in no very cordial tone of welcome, she conducted her to a more open part of the maze, where various golden chairs and tables were heaped together, and where a number of young ladies were sitting on anything they could find, chattering. All these young ladies wanted ironing, and all had a curious way of looking everywhere, while they chattered.

Just as the sisters arrived here, a monotonous boy in a Scotch cap put his head round a beam on the left, and said, "Less noise there, ladies!" and disappeared. Immediately after which, a sprightly gentleman with a quantity of long black hair looked round a beam on the right, and said, "Less noise there, darlings!" and also disappeared.

"The notion of you among professionals, Amy, is really the last thing I could have conceived!" said her sister.

"Why, how did you ever get here?"

"I don't know. The lady who told you I was here, was so good as to bring me in."

"Like you quiet little things! You can make your way anywhere, I believe. I couldn't have managed it, Amy, though I know so much more of the world."

It was the family custom to lay it down as family law, that she was a plain domestic little creature, without the great and sage experiences of the rest. This family fiction was the family assertion of itself against her services. Not to make too much of them.

"Well! And what have you got on your mind, Amy? Of course you have got something on your mind, about me?" said Fanny. She spoke as if her sister, between two and three years her junior, were her prejudiced grandmother.

"It is not much; but since you told me of the lady who gave you the bracelet, Fanny —"

The monotonous boy put his head round the beam on the left, and said, "Look out there, ladies!" and disappeared. The sprightly gentleman with the black hair as suddenly put his head round the beam on the right, and said, "Look out there, darlings!" and also disappeared. Thereupon all the young ladies rose, and began shaking their skirts out behind.

"Well, Amy?" said Fanny, doing as the rest did; "what were you going to say?"

"Since you told me a lady had given you the bracelet you showed me, Fanny, I have not been quite easy on your account, and indeed want to know a little more if you will confide more to me."

"Now, ladies!" said the boy in the Scotch cap. "Now, darlings!" said the gentleman with the black hair. They were every one gone in a moment, and the music and the dancing feet were heard again.

Little Dorrit sat down in a golden chair, made quite giddy by these rapid interruptions. Her sister and the rest were a long time gone; and during their absence a voice (it appeared to be that of the gentleman with the black hair) was continually calling out through the music, "One, two, three, four, five, six — go! Steady, darlings! One, two, three, four, five, six — go!" Ultimately the voice stopped, and they all came back again, more or less out of breath, folding themselves in their shawls, and making ready for the streets. "Stop a moment, Amy, and let them get away before us," whispered Fanny. They were soon left alone; nothing more important happening, in the mean time, than the boy looking round his old beam, and saying, "Everybody at eleven to-morrow, ladies!" and the gentleman with the black hair looking round his old beam, and saying, "Everybody at eleven to-morrow, darlings!" each in his own accustomed manner.

When they were alone, something was rolled up or by other means got out of the way, and there was a great empty well before them, looking down into the depths of which Fanny said, "Now, uncle!" Little Dorrit, as her eyes became used to the darkness, faintly made him out, at the bottom of the well, in an obscure corner by himself, with his instrument in its ragged case under his arm.

The old man looked as if the remote high gallery windows, with their little strip of sky, might have been the point of his better fortunes, from which he had descended,

until he had gradually sunk down below there to the bottom. He had been in that place six nights a week for many years, but had never been observed to raise his eyes above his music-book, and was confidently believed to have never seen a play. There were legends in the place that he did not so much as know the popular heroes and heroines by sight, and that the low comedian had "mugged" at him in his richest manner fifty nights for a wager, and he had shown no trace of consciousness. The carpenters had a joke to the effect that he was dead without being aware of it; and the frequenters of the pit supposed him to pass his whole life, night and day and Sunday and all, in the orchestra. They had tried him a few times with pinches of snuff offered over the rails, and he had always responded to this attention with a momentary waking up of manner that had the pale phantom of a gentleman in it: beyond this he never, on any occasion, had any other part in what was going on than the part written out for the clarionet; in private life, where there was no part for the clarionet, he had no part at all. Some said he was poor, some said he was a wealthy miser; but he said nothing, never lifted up his bowed head, never varied his shuffling gait by getting his springless foot from the ground. Though expecting now to be summoned by his niece, he did not hear her until she had spoken to him three or four times; nor was he at all surprised by the presence of two nieces instead of one, but merely said, in his tremulous voice, "I am coming, I am coming!" and crept forth by some underground way which emitted a cellarous smell.

"And so, Amy," said her sister, when the three together passed out, at the door that had such a shame-faced consciousness of being different from other doors:

the uncle instinctively taking Amy's arm as the arm to be relied on: "so, Amy, you are curious about me?"

She was pretty, and conscious, and rather flaunting; and the condescension with which she put aside the superiority of her charms, and of her worldly experience, and addressed her sister on almost equal terms, had a vast deal of the family in it.

"I am interested, Fanny, and concerned in anything that concerns you."

"So you are, so you are, and you are the best of Amys. If I am ever a little provoking, I am sure you'll consider what a thing it is to occupy my position and feel a consciousness of being superior to it. "I shouldn't care," said the Daughter of the Father of the Marshalsea, "if the others were not so common. None of them have come down in the world as we have. They are all on their own level. Common."

Little Dorrit mildly looked at the speaker, but did not interrupt her. Fanny took out her handkerchief, and rather angrily wiped her eyes. "I was not born where you were, you know, Amy, and perhaps that makes a difference. My dear child, when we get rid of uncle, you shall know all about it. We'll drop him at the cook's shop where he is going to dine."

They walked on with him until they came to a dirty shop-window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings. But, glimpses were to be caught of a roast leg of pork, bursting into tears of sage and onion in a metal reservoir full of gravy, of an unctuous piece of roast beef and blisterous Yorkshire pudding bubbling hot in a similar receptacle, of a stuffed fillet of veal in rapid cut, of a ham in a perspiration with the pace it was going at,

of a shallow tank of baked potatoes glued together by their own richness, of a truss or two of boiled greens, and other substantial delicacies. Within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in their stomachs than in their hands, packed their purchases in solitude. Fanny, opening her reticule as they surveyed these things, produced from that repository a shilling and handed it to Uncle. Uncle, after not looking at it a little while, divined its object, and muttering "Dinner? Ha! Yes, yes, yes!" slowly vanished from them into the mist.

"Now, Amy," said her sister, "come with me, if you are not too tired to walk to Harley Street, Cavendish Square."

The air with which she threw off this distinguished address, and the toss she gave her new bonnet (which was more gauzy than serviceable) made her sister wonder; however, she expressed her readiness to go to Harley Street, and thither they directed their steps. Arrived at that grand destination, Fanny singled out the handsomest house, and knocking at the door inquired for Mrs. Merdle. The footman who opened the door, although he had powder on his head, and was backed up by two other footmen likewise powdered, not only admitted Mrs. Merdle to be at home, but asked Fanny to walk in. Fanny walked in, taking her sister with her; and they went up-stairs with powder going before and powder stopping behind, and were left in a spacious semi-circular drawing-room, one of several drawing-rooms, where there was a parrot on the outside of a golden cage holding on by its beak with its scaly legs in the air, and putting itself into many strange upside-down post-

ures. This peculiarity has been observed in birds of quite another feather, climbing upon golden wires.

The room was far more splendid than anything Little Dorrit had ever imagined, and would have been splendid and costly in any eyes. She looked in amazement at her sister and would have asked a question, but that Fanny with a warning frown pointed to a curtained doorway of communication with another room. The curtain shook next moment, and a lady, raising it with a heavily ringed hand, dropped it behind her again as she entered.

The lady was not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. She had large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom, and was made the most of in every particular. Either because she had a cold, or because it suited her face, she wore a rich white fillet tied over her head and under her chin. And if ever there were an unfeeling handsome chin that looked as if, for certain, it had never been, in familiar parlance, "chucked" by the hand of man, it was the chin curbed up so tight and close by that laced bridle.

"Mrs. Merdle," said Fanny. "My sister, ma'am."

"I am glad to see your sister, Miss Dorrit. I did not remember that you had a sister."

"I did not mention that I had," said Fanny.

"Ay!" Mrs. Merdle curved the little finger of her left hand as who should say, "I have caught you. I know you didn't!" All her action was usually with her left hand because her hands were not a pair; the left being much the whiter and plumper of the two. Then she added, "Sit down," and composed herself volupt-

uously, in a nest of crimson and gold cushions, on an ottoman near the parrot.

"Also professional?" said Mrs. Merdle, looking at Little Dorrit through an eye-glass.

Fanny answered No. "No," said Mrs. Merdle, dropping her glass. "Has not a professional air. Very pleasant; but not professional."

"My sister, ma'am," said Fanny, in whom there was a singular mixture of deference and hardihood, "has been asking me to tell her, as between sisters, how I came to have the honor of knowing you. And as I had engaged to call upon you once more, I thought I might take the liberty of bringing her with me, when perhaps you would tell her. I wish her to know, and perhaps you will tell her."

"Do you think, at your sister's age" — hinted Mrs. Merdle.

"She is much older than she looks," said Fanny; "almost as old as I am."

"Society," said Mrs. Merdle, with another curve of her little finger, "is so difficult to explain to young persons (indeed is so difficult to explain to most persons), that I am glad to hear that. I wish Society was not so arbitrary, I wish it was not so exacting — Bird, be quiet!"

The parrot had given a most piercing shriek, as if its name were Society and it asserted its right to its exactions.

"But," resumed Mrs. Merdle, "we must take it as we find it. We know it is hollow and conventional and worldly and very shocking, but unless we are Savages in the Tropical seas (I should have been charmed to be one myself — most delightful life and perfect climate I am

told), we must consult it. It is the common lot. Mr. Merdle is a most extensive merchant, his transactions are on the vastest scale, his wealth and influence are very great, but even he — Bird, be quiet !”

The parrot had shrieked another shriek ; and it filled up the sentence so expressively that Mrs. Merdle was under no necessity to end it.

“ Since your sister begs that I would terminate our personal acquaintance,” she began again, addressing Little Dorrit, “ by relating the circumstances that are much to her credit, I cannot object to comply with her request, I am sure. I have a son (I was first married extremely young) of two or three and twenty.”

Fanny set her lips, and her eyes looked half triumphantly at her sister.

“ A son of two or three and twenty. He is a little gay, a thing Society is accustomed to in young men, and he is very impressible. Perhaps he inherits that misfortune. I am very impressible myself, by nature. The weakest of creatures. My feelings are touched in a moment.”

She said all this, and everything else, as coldly as a woman of snow ; quite forgetting the sisters except at odd times, and apparently addressing some abstraction of Society. For whose behoof, too, she occasionally arranged her dress, or the composition of her figure upon the ottoman.

“ So he is very impressible. Not a misfortune in our natural state, I dare say, but we are not in a natural state. Much to be lamented, no doubt, particularly by myself, who am a child of nature if I could but show it ; but so it is. Society suppresses us and dominates us — Bird, be quiet !”

The parrot had broken into a violent fit of laughter, after twisting divers bars of his cage with his crooked bill, and licking them with his black tongue.

"It is quite unnecessary to say to a person of your good sense, wide range of experience, and cultivated feelings," said Mrs. Merdle, from her nest of crimson and gold — and there put up her glass to refresh her memory as to whom she was addressing, — "that the stage sometimes has a fascination for young men of that class of character. In saying the stage, I mean the people on it of the female sex. Therefore, when I heard that my son was supposed to be fascinated by a dancer, I knew what that usually meant in Society, and confided in her being a dancer at the Opera, where young men moving in Society are usually fascinated."

She passed her white hands over one another, observant of the sisters now; and the rings upon her fingers grated against each other, with a hard sound.

"As your sister will tell you, when I found what the theatre was, I was much surprised and much distressed. But when I found that your sister, by rejecting my son's advances (I must add, in an unexpected manner), had brought him to the point of proposing marriage, my feelings were of the profoundest anguish — acute."

She traced the outline of her left eyebrow, and put it right.

"In a distracted condition which only a mother — moving in Society — can be susceptible of, I determined to go myself to the theatre, and represent my state of mind to the dancer. I made myself known to your sister. I found her, to my surprise, in many respects different from my expectations; and certainly in none more so, than in meeting me with — what shall I say?

— a sort of family assertion on her own part? ” Mrs. Merdle smiled.

“ I told you, ma’am,” said Fanny, with a heightening color, “ that although you found me in that situation, I was so far above the rest, that I considered my family as good as your son’s ; and that I had a brother who, knowing the circumstances, would be of the same opinion, and would not consider such a connection any honor.”

“ Miss Dorrit,” said Mrs. Merdle, after frostily looking at her through her glass, “ precisely what I was on the point of telling your sister, in pursuance of your request. Much obliged to you for recalling it so accurately and anticipating me. I immediately,” addressing Little Dorrit, “ (for I am the creature of impulse), took a bracelet from my arm, and begged your sister to let me clasp it on hers, in token of the delight I had in our being able to approach the subject so far on a common footing.” (This was perfectly true, the lady having bought a cheap and showy article on her way to the interview, with a general eye to bribery.)

“ And I told you, Mrs. Merdle,” said Fanny, “ that we might be unfortunate, but were not common.”

“ I think, the very words, Miss Dorrit,” assented Mrs. Merdle.

“ And I told you, Mrs. Merdle,” said Fanny, “ that if you spoke to me of the superiority of your son’s standing in Society, it was barely possible that you rather deceived yourself in your suppositions about my origin ; and that my father’s standing, even in the Society in which he now moved (what that was, was best known to myself), was eminently superior, and was acknowledged by every one.”

"Quite accurate," rejoined Mrs. Merdle. "A most admirable memory."

"Thank you, ma'am. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell my sister the rest."

"There is very little to tell," said Mrs. Merdle, reviewing the breadth of bosom which seemed essential to her having room enough to be unfeeling in, "but it is to your sister's credit. I pointed out to your sister the plain state of the case; the impossibility of the Society in which we moved, recognizing the Society in which she moved — though charming, I have no doubt; the immense disadvantage at which she would consequently place the family she had so high an opinion of, upon which we should find ourselves compelled to look down with contempt, and from which (socially speaking) we should feel obliged to recoil with abhorrence. In short, I made an appeal to that laudable pride in your sister."

"Let my sister know, if you please, Mrs. Merdle," Fanny pouted, with a toss of her gauzy bonnet, "that I had already had the honor of telling your son that I wished to have nothing whatever to say to him."

"Well, Miss Dorrit," assented Mrs. Merdle, "perhaps I might have mentioned that before. If I did not think of it, perhaps it was because my mind reverted to the apprehensions I had at the time, that he might persevere and you might have something to say to him. I also mentioned to your sister — I again address the non-professional Miss Dorrit — that my son would have nothing in the event of such a marriage, and would be an absolute beggar. (I mention that, merely as a fact which is part of the narrative, and not as supposing it to have influenced your sister, except in the prudent and legitimate way in which, constituted as our artificial system

is, we must all be influenced by such considerations.) Finally, after some high words and high spirit on the part of your sister, we came to the complete understanding that there was no danger; and your sister was so obliging as to allow me to present her with a mark or two of my appreciation at my dressmaker's."

Little Dorrit looked sorry, and glanced at Fanny with a troubled face.

"Also," said Mrs. Merdle, "as to promise to give me the present pleasure of a closing interview, and of parting with her on the best of terms. On which occasion, added Mrs. Merdle, quitting her nest, and putting something in Fanny's hand, "Miss Dorrit will permit me to say Farewell with best wishes, in my own dull manner."

The sisters rose at the same time, and they all stood near the cage of the parrot, as he tore at a claw-full of biscuit and spat it out, seemed to mock them with a pompous dance of his body without moving his feet, and suddenly turned himself upside down and trailed himself all over the outside of his golden cage, with the aid of his cruel beak and his black tongue.

"Adieu, Miss Dorrit, with best wishes," said Mrs. Merdle. "If we could only come to a Millennium, or something of that sort, I for one might have the pleasure of knowing a number of charming and talented persons from whom I am at present excluded. A more primitive state of society would be delicious to me. There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons, something about Lo the poor Indian whose something mind! If a few thousand persons moving in Society, could only go and be Indians, I would put my name down directly; but as, moving in Society, we can't be Indians, unfortunately — Good morning!"

They came down-stairs with powder before them and powder behind, the elder sister haughty and the younger sister humbled, and were shut out into unpowdered Harley Street, Cavendish Square.

"Well?" said Fanny, when they had gone a little way without speaking. "Have you nothing to say, Amy?"

"Oh, I don't know what to say!" she answered, distressed. "You didn't like this young man, Fanny?"

"Like him? He is almost an idiot."

"I am so sorry — don't be hurt — but, since you ask me what I have to say, I am so very sorry, Fanny, that you suffered this lady to give you anything."

"You little Fool!" returned her sister, shaking her with the sharp pull she gave her arm. "Have you no spirit at all? But that's just the way! You have no self-respect, you have no becoming pride. Just as you allow yourself to be followed about by a contemptible little Chivery of a thing," with the scornfullest emphasis, "you would let your family be trodden on, and never turn."

"Don't say that, dear Fanny. I do what I can for them."

"You do what you can for them!" repeated Fanny, walking her on very fast. "Would you let a woman like this, whom you could see, if you had any experience of anything, to be as false and insolent as a woman can be — would you let her put her foot upon your family, and thank her for it?"

"No, Fanny, I am sure."

"Then make her pay for it, you mean little thing. What else can you make her do? Make her pay for it, you stupid child; and do your family some credit with the money!"

They spoke no more, all the way back to the lodging where Fanny and her uncle lived. When they arrived there, they found the old man practising his clarionet in the dolefullest manner in a corner of the room. Fanny had a composite meal to make, of chops, and porter, and tea; and indignantly pretended to prepare it for herself, though her sister did all that in quiet reality. When, at last, Fanny sat down to eat and drink, she threw the table implements about and was angry with her bread, much as her father had been last night.

"If you despise me," she said, bursting into vehement tears, "because I am a dancer, why did you put me in the way of being one? It was your doing. You would have me stoop as low as the ground before this Mrs. Merdle, and let her say what she liked and do what she liked, and hold us all in contempt, and tell me so to my face. Because I am a dancer!"

"O Fanny!"

"And Tip too, poor fellow. She is to disparage him just as much as she likes, without any check — I suppose because he has been in the law, and the docks, and different things. Why, it was your doing, Amy. You might at least approve of his being defended."

All this time the uncle was dolefully blowing his clarionet in the corner, sometimes taking it an inch or so from his mouth for a moment while he stopped to gaze at them, with a vague impression that somebody had said something.

"And your father, your poor father, Amy. Because he is not free, to show himself and to speak for himself, you would let such people insult him with impunity. If you don't feel for yourself because you go out to work, you might at least feel for him, I should think, knowing what he has undergone so long."

Poor Little Dorrit felt the injustice of this taunt rather sharply. The remembrance of last night added a barbed point to it. She said nothing in reply, but turned her chair from the table towards the fire. Uncle, after making one more pause, blew a dismal wail and went on again.

Fanny was passionate with the teacups and the bread as long as her passion lasted, and then protested that she was the wretchedest girl in the world, and she wished she was dead. After that, her crying became remorseful, and she got up and put her arms round her sister. Little Dorrit tried to stop her from saying anything, but she answered that she would, she must! Thereupon she said again, and again, "I beg your pardon, Amy," and "Forgive me, Amy," almost as passionately as she had said what she regretted.

"But indeed, indeed, Amy," she resumed, when they were seated in sisterly accord side by side, "I hope and I think you would have seen this differently, if you had known a little more of Society."

"Perhaps I might, Fanny," said the mild Little Dorrit.

"You see, while you have been domestic and resignedly shut up there, Amy," pursued her sister, gradually beginning to patronize, "I have been out, moving more in Society, and may have been getting proud and spirited — more than I ought to be, perhaps?"

Little Dorrit answered "Yes. O yes!"

"And while you have been thinking of the dinner or the clothes, I may have been thinking, you know, of the family. Now, may it not be so, Amy?"

Little Dorrit again nodded "Yes," with a more cheerful face than heart.

"Especially as we know," said Fanny, "that there certainly is a tone in the place to which you have been so true, which does belong to it, and which does make it different from other aspects of Society. So kiss me once again, Amy dear, and we will agree that we may both be right, and that you are a tranquil, domestic, home-loving, good girl."

The clarionet had been lamenting most pathetically during this dialogue, but was cut short now by Fanny's announcement that it was time to go; which she conveyed to her uncle by shutting up his scrap of music, and taking the clarionet out of his mouth.

Little Dorrit parted from them at the door, and hastened back to the Marshalsea. It fell dark there sooner than elsewhere, and going into it that evening was like going into a deep trench. The shadow of the wall was on every object. Not least, upon the figure in the old gray gown and the black velvet cap, as it turned towards her when she opened the door of the dim room.

"Why not upon me too!" thought Little Dorrit, with the door yet in her hand. "It was not unreasonable in Fanny."

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. MERDLE'S COMPLAINT.

UPON that establishment of state, the Merdle establishment in Harley Street, Cavendish Square, there was the shadow of no more common wall than the fronts of other establishments of state on the opposite side of the street. Like unexceptionable Society, the opposing rows of houses in Harley Street were very grim with one another. Indeed, the mansions and their inhabitants were so much alike in that respect, that the people were often to be found drawn up on opposite sides of dinner-tables, in the shade of their own loftiness, staring at the other side of the way with the dulness of the houses.

Everybody knows how like the street the two dinner-rows of people who take their stand by the street will be. The expressionless uniform twenty houses, all to be knocked at and rung at in the same form, all approachable by the same dull steps, all fended off by the same pattern of railing, all with the same impracticable fire-escapes, the same inconvenient fixtures in their heads, and everything without exception to be taken at a high valuation — who has not dined with these? The house so drearily out of repair, the occasional bow-window, the stuccoed house, the newly-fronted house, the corner house with nothing but angular rooms, the house with the blinds always down, the house with the hatchment always up,

the house where the collector has called for one quarter of an Idea, and found nobody at home — who has not dined with these? The house that nobody will take, and is to be had a bargain — who does not know her? The showy house that was taken for life by the disappointed gentleman, and which doesn't suit him at all — who is unacquainted with that haunted habitation?

Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was more than aware of Mr. and Mrs. Merdle. Intruders there were in Harley Street, of whom it was not aware; but Mr. and Mrs. Merdle it delighted to honor. Society was aware of Mr. and Mrs. Merdle. Society had said "Let us license them; let us know them."

Mr. Merdle was immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise; a Midas without the ears, who turned all he touched to gold. He was in everything good, from banking to building. He was in Parliament, of course. He was in the City, necessarily. He was Chairman of this, Trustee of that, President of the other. The weightiest of men had said to projectors, "Now, what name have you got? Have you got Merdle?" And, the reply being in the negative, had said, "Then I won't look at you."

This great and fortunate man had provided that extensive bosom, which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold some fifteen years before. It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr. Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose. Storr and Mortimer might have married on the same speculation.

Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage.

The bosom, moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving, Mr. Merdle was satisfied. He was the most disinterested of men, — did everything for Society, and got as little for himself, out of all his gain and care, as a man might.

That is to say, it may be supposed that he got all he wanted, otherwise with unlimited wealth he would have got it. But his desire was to the utmost to satisfy Society (whatever that was), and take up all its drafts upon him for tribute. He did not shine in company; he had not very much to say for himself; he was a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red color in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands. In the little he said, he was a pleasant man enough; plain, emphatic about public and private confidence, and tenacious of the utmost deference being shown by every one, in all things, to Society. In this same Society (if that were it which came to his dinners, and to Mrs. Merdle's receptions and concerts), he hardly seemed to enjoy himself much, and was mostly to be found against walls and behind doors. Also when he went out to it, instead of its coming home to him, he seemed a little fatigued, and upon the whole rather more disposed for bed; but he was always cultivating it nevertheless, and always moving in it, and always laying out money on it with the greatest liberality.

Mrs. Merdle's first husband had been a colonel, under whose auspices the bosom had entered into competition with the snows of North America, and had come off at

little disadvantage in point of whiteness, and at none in point of coldness. The colonel's son was Mrs. Merdle's only child. He was of a chuckle-headed high-shouldered make, with a general appearance of being, not so much a young man as a swelled boy. He had given so few signs of reason, that a byword went among his companions that his brain had been frozen up in a mighty frost which prevailed at St. John's, New Brunswick, at the period of his birth there, and had never thawed from that hour. Another byword represented him as having in his infancy, through the negligence of a nurse, fallen out of a high window on his head, which had been heard by responsible witnesses to crack. It is probable that both these representations were of *ex post facto* origin; the young gentleman (whose expressive name was Sparkler) being monomaniacal in offering marriage to all manner of undesirable young ladies, and in remarking of every successive young lady to whom he tendered a matrimonial proposal that she was "a doosed fine gal — well educated too — with no biggodd nonsense about her."

A son-in-law, with these limited talents, might have been a clog upon another man; but Mr. Merdle did not want a son-in-law for himself; he wanted a son-in-law for Society. Mr. Sparkler having been in the Guards, and being in the habit of frequenting all the races, and all the lounges, and all the parties, and being well known, Society was satisfied with its son-in-law. This happy result Mr. Merdle would have considered well attained, though Mr. Sparkler had been a more expensive article. And he did not get Mr. Sparkler by any means cheap for Society, even as it was.

There was a dinner giving in the Harley Street estab-

ishment, while Little Dorrit was stitching at her father's new shirts by his side that night ; and there were magnates from the Court and magnates from the City, magnates from the Commons and magnates from the Lords, magnates from the bench and magnates from the bar, Bishop magnates, Treasury magnates, Horse Guards magnates, Admiralty magnates, — all the magnates that keep us going, and sometimes trip us up.

"I am told," said Bishop magnate to Horse Guards, "that Mr. Merdle has made another enormous hit. They say a hundred thousand pounds."

Horse Guards had heard two.

Treasury had heard three.

Bar, handling his persuasive double eye-glass, was by no means clear but that it might be four. It was one of those happy strokes of calculation and combination, the result of which it was difficult to estimate. It was one of those instances of a comprehensive grasp, associated with habitual luck and characteristic boldness, of which an age presented us but few. But here was Brother Bellows, who had been in the great Bank case, and who could probably tell us more. What did Brother Bellows put this new success at ?

Brother Bellows was on his way to make his bow to the bosom, and could only tell them in passing that he had heard it stated, with great appearance of truth, as being worth, from first to last, half a million of money.

Admiralty said Mr. Merdle was a wonderful man. Treasury said he was a new power in the country, and would be able to buy up the whole House of Commons. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who was always disposed to maintain the best interests of Society.

Mr. Merdle himself was usually late on these occasions, as a man still detained in the clutch of giant enterprises when other men had shaken off their dwarfs for the day. On this occasion, he was the last arrival. Treasury said Merdle's work punished him a little. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who accepted it with meekness.

Powder! There was so much Powder in waiting, that it flavored the dinner. Pulverous particles got into the dishes, and Society's meats had a seasoning of first-rate footmen. Mr. Merdle took down a countess who was secluded somewhere in the core of an immense dress, to which she was in the proportion of the heart to the overgrown cabbage. If so low a simile may be admitted, the dress went down the staircase like a richly brocaded Jack in the Green, and nobody knew what sort of small person carried it.

Society had everything it could want, and could not want, for dinner. It had everything to look at, and everything to eat, and everything to drink. It is to be hoped it enjoyed itself; for Mr. Merdle's own share of the repast might have been paid for with eighteenpence. Mrs. Merdle was magnificent. The chief butler was the next magnificent institution of the day. He was the stateliest man in company. He did nothing, but he looked on as few other men could have done. He was Mr. Merdle's last gift to Society. Mr. Merdle didn't want him, and was put out of countenance when the great creature looked at him; but inappeasable Society would have him — and had got him.

The invisible countess carried out the Green at the usual stage of the entertainment, and the file of beauty

was closed up by the bosom. Treasury said, Juno. Bishop said, Judith.

Bar fell into discussion with Horse Guards concerning courts-martial. Brother Bellows and Bench struck in. Other magnates paired off. Mr. Merdle sat silent, and looked at the tablecloth. Sometimes a magnate addressed him, to turn the stream of his own particular discussion towards him; but Mr. Merdle seldom gave much attention to it, or did more than rouse himself from his calculations and pass the wine.

When they rose, so many of the magnates had something to say to Mr. Merdle individually, that he held little levees by the sideboard, and checked them off as they went out at the door.

Treasury hoped he might venture to congratulate one of England's world-famed capitalists and merchant-princes (he had turned that original sentiment in the house a few times, and it came easy to him) on a new achievement. To extend the triumphs of such men, was to extend the triumphs and resources of the nation; and Treasury felt—he gave Mr. Merdle to understand—patriotic on the subject.

"Thank you, my lord," said Mr. Merdle; "thank you. I accept your congratulations with pride, and I am glad you approve."

"Why, I don't unreservedly approve, my dear Mr. Merdle. Because," smiling Treasury turned him by the arm towards the sideboard and spoke banteringly, "it never can be worth your while to come among us and help us."

Mr. Merdle felt honored by the —

"No, no," said Treasury, "that is not the light in which one so distinguished for practical knowledge, and

great foresight, can be expected to regard it. If we should ever be happily enabled, by accidentally possessing the control over circumstances, to propose to one so eminent to — to come among us, and give us the weight of his influence, knowledge, and character, we could only propose it to him as a duty. In fact, as a duty that he owed to Society."

Mr. Merdle intimated that Society was the apple of his eye, and that its claims were paramount to every other consideration. Treasury moved on, and Bar came up.

Bar, with his little insinuating Jury droop, and fingering his persuasive double eye-glass, hoped he might be excused if he mentioned to one of the greatest converters of the root of all evil into the root of all good, who had for a long time reflected a shining lustre on the annals even of our commercial country — if he mentioned, disinterestedly, and as, what we lawyers called in our pedantic way, *amicus curiæ*, a fact that had come by accident within his knowledge. He had been required to look over the title of a very considerable estate in one of the eastern counties — lying, in fact, for Mr. Merdle knew we lawyers loved to be particular, on the borders of two of the eastern counties. Now, the title was perfectly sound, and the estate was to be purchased by one who had the command of — Money (Jury droop and persuasive eye-glass), on remarkably advantageous terms. This had come to Bar's knowledge only that day, and it had occurred to him "I shall have the honor of dining with my esteemed friend Mr. Merdle this evening, and, strictly between ourselves, I will mention the opportunity." Such a purchase would involve not only great legitimate political influence, but some half dozen church presentations

of considerable annual value. Now, that Mr. Merdle was already at no loss to discover means of occupying even his capital, and of fully employing even his active and vigorous intellect, Bar well knew: but he would venture to suggest that the question arose in his mind, whether one who had deservedly gained so high a position and so European a reputation did not owe it — we would not say to himself, but we would say to Society, to possess himself of such influences as these; and to exercise them — we would not say for his own, or for his party's, but we would say for Society's — benefit.

Mr. Merdle again expressed himself as wholly devoted to that object of his constant consideration, and Bar took his persuasive eye-glass up the grand staircase. Bishop then came undesignedly sliding in the direction of the sideboard.

Surely the goods of this world, it occurred in an accidental way to Bishop to remark, could scarcely be directed into happier channels than when they accumulated under the magic touch of the wise and sagacious, who, while they knew the just value of riches (Bishop tried here to look as if he were rather poor himself), were aware of their importance, judiciously governed and rightly distributed, to the welfare of our brethren at large.

Mr. Merdle with humility expressed his conviction that Bishop couldn't mean him, and with inconsistency expressed his high gratification in Bishop's good opinion.

Bishop then — jauntily stepping out a little with his well-shaped right leg, as though he said to Mr. Merdle “don't mind the apron; a mere form!” — put this case to his good friend:

Whether it had occurred to his good friend, that So-

ciety might not unreasonably hope that one so blest in his undertakings, and whose example on his pedestal was so influential with it, would shed a little money in the direction of a mission or so to Africa?

Mr. Merdle signifying that the idea should have his best attention, Bishop put another case:

Whether his good friend had at all interested himself in the proceedings of our Combined Additional Endowed Dignitaries Committee, and whether it had occurred to him that to shed a little money in *that* direction might be a great conception finely executed?

Mr. Merdle made a similar reply, and Bishop explained his reason for inquiring.

Society looked to such men as his good friend to do such things. It was not that *he* looked to them, but that Society looked to them. Just as it was not Our Committee who wanted the Additional Endowed Dignitaries, but it was Society that was in a state of the most agonizing uneasiness of mind until it got them. He begged to assure his good friend, that he was extremely sensible of his good friend's regard on all occasions for the best interests of Society; and he considered that he was at once consulting those interests, and expressing the feeling of Society, when he wished him continued prosperity, continued increase of riches, and continued things in general.

Bishop then betook himself up-stairs, and the other magnates gradually floated up after him until there was no one left below but Mr. Merdle. That gentleman, after looking at the tablecloth until the soul of the chief butler glowed with a noble resentment, went slowly up after the rest, and became of no account in the stream of people on the grand staircase. Mrs. Merdle was at home,

the best of the jewels were hung out to be seen, Society got what it came for, Mr. Merdle drank twopennyworth of tea in a corner and got more than he wanted.

Among the evening magnates was a famous physician, who knew everybody, and whom everybody knew. On entering at the door, he came upon Mr. Merdle drinking his tea in a corner, and touched him on the arm.

Mr. Merdle started. "Oh! It's you!"

"Any better to-day?"

"No," said Mr. Merdle, "I am no better."

"A pity I didn't see you this morning. Pray come to me to-morrow, or let me come to you."

"Well!" he replied. "I will come to-morrow as I drive by."

Bar and Bishop had both been bystanders during this short dialogue, and as Mr. Merdle was swept away by the crowd, they made their remarks upon it to the Physician. Bar said, there was a certain point of mental strain beyond which no man could go; that the point varied with various textures of brain and peculiarities of constitution, as he had had occasion to notice in several of his learned brothers; but, the point of endurance passed by a line's breath, depression and dyspepsia ensued. Not to intrude on the sacred mysteries of medicine, he took it, now (with the Jury droop and persuasive eye-glass), that this was Merdle's case? Bishop said that when he was a young man, and had fallen for a brief space into the habit of writing sermons on Saturdays, a habit which all young sons of the church should sedulously avoid, he had frequently been sensible of a depression, arising as he supposed from an overtaxed intellect, upon which the yolk of a new-laid egg, beaten up by the good woman in whose house he at that time lodged, with a glass of sound

sherry, nutmeg, and powdered sugar, acted like a charm. Without presuming to offer so simple a remedy to the consideration of so profound a professor of the great healing art, he would venture to inquire whether the strain, being by way of intricate calculations, the spirits might not (humanly speaking) be restored to their tone by a gentle and yet generous stimulant?

"Yes," said the physician, "yes, you are both right. But I may as well tell you that I can find nothing the matter with Mr. Merdle. He has the constitution of a rhinoceros, the digestion of an ostrich, and the concentration of an oyster. As to nerves, Mr. Merdle is of a cool temperament, and not a sensitive man: is about as invulnerable, I should say, as Achilles. How such a man should suppose himself unwell without reason, you may think strange. But I have found nothing the matter with him. He may have some deep-seated recondite complaint. I can't say. I only say, that at present I have not found it out."

There was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on the bosom now displaying precious stones in rivalry with many similar superb jewel-stands; there was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on young Sparkler hovering about the rooms, monomaniacally seeking any sufficiently ineligible young lady with no nonsense about her; there was no shadow of Mr. Merdle's complaint on the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, of whom whole colonies were present; or on any of the company. Even on himself, its shadow was faint enough as he moved about among the throng, receiving homage.

Mr. Merdle's complaint. Society and he had so much to do with one another in all things else, that it is hard to imagine his complaint, if he had one, being solely his

own affair. Had he that deep-seated recondite complaint, and did any doctor find it out? Patience. In the mean time, the shadow of the Marshalsea wall was a real darkening influence, and could be seen on the Dorrit Family at any stage of the sun's course.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PUZZLE.

MR. CLENNAM did not increase in favor with the Father of the Marshalsea in the ratio of his increasing visits. His obtuseness on the great Testimonial question was not calculated to awaken admiration in the paternal breast, but had rather a tendency to give offence in that sensitive quarter, and to be regarded as a positive shortcoming in point of gentlemanly feeling. An impression of disappointment, occasioned by the discovery that Mr. Clennam scarcely possessed that delicacy for which, in the confidence of his nature, he had been inclined to give him credit, began to darken the fatherly mind in connection with that gentleman. The father went so far as to say, in his private family circle, that he feared Mr. Clennam was not a man of high instincts. He was happy, he observed, in his public capacity as leader and representative of the College, to receive Mr. Clennam when he called to pay his respects; but he didn't find that he got on with him personally. There appeared to be something (he didn't know what it was) wanting in him. Howbeit, the father did not fail in any outward show of politeness, but, on the contrary, honored him with much attention; perhaps cherishing the hope that, although not a man of a sufficiently brilliant and spontaneous turn of mind to repeat his former testimonial unsolicited, it

might still be within the compass of his nature to bear the part of a responsive gentleman, in any correspondence that way tending.

In the threefold capacity, of the gentleman from outside who had been accidentally locked in on the night of his first appearance, of the gentleman from outside who had inquired into the affairs of the Father of the Marshalsea with the stupendous idea of getting him out, and of the gentleman from outside who took an interest in the child of the Marshalsea, Clennam soon became a visitor of mark. He was not surprised by the attentions he received from Mr. Chivery when that officer was on the lock, for he made little distinction between Mr. Chivery's politeness and that of the other turnkeys. It was on one particular afternoon that Mr. Chivery surprised him all at once, and stood forth from his companions in bold relief.

Mr. Chivery, by some artful exercise of his power of clearing the Lodge, had contrived to rid it of all sauntering Collegians; so that Clennam, coming out of the prison, should find him on duty alone.

"(Private) I ask your pardon, sir," said Mr. Chivery in a secret manner; "but which way might you be going?"

"I am going over the Bridge." He saw in Mr. Chivery, with some astonishment, quite an Allegory of Silence, as he stood with his key on his lips.

"(Private) I ask your pardon again," said Mr. Chivery, "but could you go round by Horsemonger Lane? Could you by any means find time to look in at that address?" handing him a little card, printed for circulation among the connection of Chivery and Co. Tobacco-nists, Importers of pure Hayannah Cigars, Bengal

Cheroots, and fine-flavored Cubas, Dealers in Fancy Snuffs, &c. &c.

"(Private) It a'n't tobacco business," said Mr. Chivery. "The truth is, it's my wife. She's wishful to say a word to you, sir, upon a point respecting — yes," said Mr. Chivery, answering Clennam's look of apprehension with a nod, "respecting *her*."

"I will make a point of seeing your wife directly."

"Thank you, sir. Much obliged. It a'n't above ten minutes out of your way. Please to ask for *Mrs. Chivery*!" These instructions, Mr. Chivery, who had already let him out, cautiously called through a little slide in the outer door, which he could draw back from within for the inspection of visitors, when it pleased him.

Arthur Clennam, with the card in his hand, betook himself to the address set forth upon it, and speedily arrived there. It was a very small establishment, wherein a decent woman sat behind the counter working at her needle. Little jars of tobacco, little boxes of cigars, a little assortment of pipes, a little jar or two of snuff, and a little instrument like a shoeing-horn for serving it out, composed the retail stock in trade.

Arthur mentioned his name, and his having promised to call, on the solicitation of Mr. Chivery. About something relating to Miss Dorrit, he believed. Mrs. Chivery at once laid aside her work, rose up from her seat behind the counter, and deplorably shook her head.

"You may see him now," said she, "if you'll condescend to take a peep."

With these mysterious words, she preceded the visitor into a little parlor behind the shop, with a little window in it commanding a very little dull back-yard. In this yard, a wash of sheets and tablecloths tried (in vain,

for want of air) to get itself dried on a line or two; and among those flapping articles was sitting in a chair, like the last mariner left alive on the deck of a damp ship without the power of furling the sails, a little woe-begone young man.

"Our John," said Mrs. Chivery.

Not to be deficient in interest, Clennam asked what he might be doing there?

"It's the only change he takes," said Mrs. Chivery, shaking her head afresh. "He won't go out, even in the back-yard, when there's no linen; but when there's linen to keep the neighbors' eyes off, he'll sit there, hours. Hours he will. Says he feels as if it was groves!" Mrs. Chivery shook her head again, put her apron in a motherly way to her eyes, and reconducted her visitor into the regions of the business.

"Please to take a seat, sir," said Mrs. Chivery. "Miss Dorrit is the matter with Our John, sir; he's a breaking his heart for her, and I would wish to take the liberty to ask how it's to be made good to his parents when bust?"

Mrs. Chivery, who was a comfortable-looking woman, much respected about Horsemonger Lane for her feelings and her conversation, uttered this speech with fell composure, and immediately afterwards began again to shake her head and dry her eyes.

"Sir," said she in continuation, "you are acquainted with the family, and have interested yourself with the family, and are influential with the family. If you can promote views calculated to make two young people happy, let me, for Our John's sake, and for both their sakes, implore you so to do."

"I have been so habituated," returned Arthur, at a

loss, "during the short time I have known her, to consider Little — I have been so habituated to consider Miss Dorrit in a light altogether removed from that in which you present her to me, that you quite take me by surprise. Does she know your son?"

"Brought up together, sir," said Mrs. Chivery. "Played together!"

"Does she know your son as her admirer?"

"Oh! bless you, sir," said Mrs. Chivery, with a sort of triumphant shiver, "she never could have seen him on a Sunday without knowing he was that. His cane alone would have told it long ago, if nothing else had. Young men like John don't take to ivory hands a pinting, for nothing. How did I first know it myself? Similarly."

"Perhaps Miss Dorrit may not be so ready as you, you see."

"Then she knows it, sir," said Mrs. Chivery, "by word of mouth."

"Are you sure?"

"Sir," said Mrs. Chivery, "sure and certain as in this house I am. I see my son go out with my own eyes when in this house I was, and I see my son come in with my own eyes when in this house I was, and I know he done it!" Mrs. Chivery derived a surprising force of emphasis from the foregoing circumstantiality and repetition.

"May I ask you how he came to fall into the desponding state which causes you so much uneasiness?"

"That," said Mrs. Chivery, "took place on that same day when to this house I see that John with these eyes return. Never been himself in this house since. Never was like what he has been since, not from the hour when

to this house seven year ago me and his father, as tenants by the quarter, came!" An effect in the nature of an affidavit was gained for this speech, by Mrs. Chivery's peculiar power of construction.

"May I venture to inquire what is your version of the matter?"

"You may," said Mrs. Chivery, "and I will give it you in honor and in word as true as in this shop I stand. Our John has every one's good word and every one's good wish. He played with her as a child when in that yard a child she played. He has known her ever since. He went out upon the Sunday afternoon when in this very parlor he had dined, and met her, with appointment or without appointment, which I do not pretend to say. He made his offer to her. Her brother and sister is high in their views, and against Our John. Her father is all for himself in his views, and against sharing her with any one. Under which circumstances she has answered Our John, 'No, John, I cannot have you, I cannot have any husband, it is not my intentions ever to become a wife, it is my intentions to be always a sacrifice, farewell, find another worthy of you, and forget me!' This is the way in which she is doomed to be a constant slave, to them that are not worthy that a constant slave she unto them should be. This is the way in which Our John has come to find no pleasure but in taking cold among the linen, and in showing in that yard, as in that yard I have myself shown you, a broken down ruin that goes home to his mother's heart!" Here the good woman pointed to the little window, whence her son might be seen sitting disconsolate in the tuneless groves; and again shook her head and wiped her eyes, and besought him, for the united sakes of both the young

people, to exercise his influence towards the bright reversal of these dismal events.

She was so confident in her exposition of the case, and it was so undeniably founded on correct premises in so far as the relative positions of Little Dorrit and her family were concerned, that Clennam could not feel positive on the other side. He had come to attach to Little Dorrit an interest so peculiar — an interest that removed her from, while it grew out of, the common and coarse things surrounding her — that he found it disappointing, disagreeable, almost painful, to suppose her in love with young Mr. Chivery in the back-yard, or any such person. On the other hand, he reasoned with himself that she was just as good and just as true, in love with him, as not in love with him; and that to make a kind of domesticated fairy of her, on the penalty of isolation at heart from the only people she knew, would be but a weakness of his own fancy, and not a kind one. Still, her youthful and ethereal appearance, her timid manner, the charm of her sensitive voice and eyes, the very many respects in which she had interested him out of her own individuality, and the strong difference between herself and those about her, were not in unison, and were determined not to be in unison, with this newly presented idea.

He told the worthy Mrs. Chivery, after turning these things over in his mind — he did that, indeed, while she was yet speaking — that he might be relied upon to do his utmost at all times to promote the happiness of Miss Dorrit, and to further the wishes of her heart if it were in his power to do so, and if he could discover what they were. At the same time, he cautioned her against assumptions and appearances; enjoined strict silence and

secrecy, lest Miss Dorrit should be made unhappy ; and particularly advised her to endeavor to win her son's confidence, and so to make quite sure of the state of the case. Mrs. Chivery considered the latter precaution superfluous, but said she would try. She shook her head as if she had not derived all the comfort she had fondly expected from this interview, but thanked him nevertheless for the trouble he had kindly taken. They then parted good friends, and Arthur walked away.

The crowd in the street jostling the crowd in his mind, and the two crowds making a confusion, he avoided London Bridge, and turned off in the quieter direction of the Iron Bridge. He had scarcely set foot upon it, when he saw Little Dorrit walking on before him. It was a pleasant day, with a light breeze blowing, and she seemed to have that minute come there for air. He had left her in her father's room within an hour.

It was a timely chance, favorable to his wish of observing her face and manner when no one else was by. He quickened his pace ; but, before he reached her, she turned her head.

"Have I startled you?" he asked.

"I thought I knew the step," she answered, hesitating.

"And did you know it, Little Dorrit? You could hardly have expected mine."

"I did not expect any. But when I heard a step, I thought it—sounded like yours."

"Are you going further?"

"No, sir, I am only walking here for a little change."

They walked together, and she recovered her confiding manner with him, and looked up in his face, as she said, after glancing around :

"It is so strange. Perhaps you can hardly understand it. I sometimes have a sensation as if it was almost unfeeling to walk here?"

"Unfeeling?"

"To see the river, and so much sky, and so many objects, and such change and motion. Then to go back, you know, and find him in the same cramped place."

"Ah yes! But going back, you must remember that you take with you the spirit and influence of such things, to cheer him."

"Do I? I hope I may! I am afraid you fancy too much, sir, and make me out too powerful. If you were in prison, could I bring such comfort to you?"

"Yes, Little Dorrit. I am sure of it!"

He gathered from a tremor on her lip, and a passing shadow of great agitation on her face, that her mind was with her father. He remained silent for a few moments, that she might regain her composure. The Little Dorrit, trembling on his arm, was less in unison than ever with Mrs. Chivery's theory, and yet was not irreconcilable with a new fancy which sprung up within him, that there might be some one else in the hopeless — newer fancy still — in the hopeless unattainable distance.

They turned, and Clennam said, Here was Maggy coming! Little Dorrit looked up, surprised, and they confronted Maggy, who brought herself at sight of them to a dead stop. She had been trotting along, so preoccupied and busy, that she had not recognized them until they turned upon her. She was now in a moment so conscience-stricken, that her very basket partook of the change.

"Maggy, you promised me to stop near father."

"So I would, Little Mother, only he wouldn't let me.

If he takes and sends me out I must go. If he takes and says, 'Maggy, you hurry away and back with that letter, and you shall have a sixpence if the answer's a good 'un,' I must take it. Lor, Little Mother, what's a poor thing of ten year old to do? And if Mr. Tip — if he happens to be a coming in as I come out, and if he says, 'Where are you going, Maggy?' and if I says, 'I'm a going So and So,' and if he says, 'I'll have a Try too,' and if he goes into the George and writes a letter, and if he gives it me and says, 'Take that one to the same place, and if the answer's a good 'un I'll give you a shilling,' it a'n't my fault, mother!"

Arthur read, in Little Dorrit's downcast eyes, to whom she foresaw that the letters were addressed.

"I'm a going So and So. There! That's where I am a going to," said Maggy. "I'm a going So and So. It a'n't you, Little Mother, that's got anything to do with it — it's you, you know," said Maggy, addressing Arthur. "You'd better come, So and So, and let me take and give 'em to you."

"We will not be so particular as that, Maggy. Give them me here," said Clennam, in a low voice.

"Well, then, come across the road," answered Maggy, in a very loud whisper. "Little Mother wasn't to know nothing of it, and she would never have known nothing of it if you had only gone, So and So, instead of bothering and loitering about. It a'n't my fault. I must do what I am told. They ought to be ashamed of themselves for telling me."

Clennam crossed to the other side, and hurriedly opened the letters. That from the father, mentioned that most unexpectedly finding himself in the novel position of having been disappointed of a remittance from

the City on which he had confidently counted, he took up his pen, being restrained by the unhappy circumstance of his incarceration during three-and-twenty years (doubly underlined), from coming himself, as he would otherwise certainly have done — took up his pen to entreat Mr. Clennam to advance him the sum of Three Pounds Ten Shillings upon his I. O. U., which he begged to enclose. That from the son set forth that Mr. Clennam would, he knew, be gratified to hear that he had at length obtained permanent employment of a highly satisfactory nature, accompanied with every prospect of complete success in life ; but that the temporary inability of his employer to pay him his arrears of salary to that date (in which condition said employer had appealed to that generous forbearance in which he trusted he should never be wanting towards a fellow-creature), combined with the fraudulent conduct of a false friend, and the present high price of provisions, had reduced him to the verge of ruin, unless he could by a quarter before six that evening raise the sum of eight pounds. This sum, Mr. Clennam would be happy to learn, he had, through the promptitude of several friends who had a lively confidence in his probity, already raised, with the exception of a trifling balance of one pound seventeen and fourpence ; the loan of which balance, for the period of one month, would be fraught with the usual beneficent consequences.

These letters Clennam answered with the aid of his pencil and pocket-book, on the spot ; sending the father what he asked for, and excusing himself from compliance with the demand of the son. He then commissioned Maggy to return with his replies, and gave her the shilling of which the failure of her supplemental enterprise would have disappointed her otherwise.

When he rejoined Little Dorrit, and they had begun walking as before, she said all at once :

"I think I had better go. I had better go home."

"Don't be distressed," said Clennam. "I have answered the letters. They were nothing. You know what they were. They were nothing."

"But I am afraid," she returned, "to leave him, I am afraid to leave any of them. When I am gone, they pervert — but they don't mean it — even Maggy."

"It was a very innocent commission that she undertook, poor thing. And in keeping it secret from you, she supposed, no doubt, that she was only saving you uneasiness."

"Yes, I hope so, I hope so. But I had better go home! It was but the other day that my sister told me I had become so used to the prison that I had its tone and character. It must be so. I am sure it must be when I see these things. My place is there. I am better there. It is unfeeling in me to be here when I can do the least thing there. Good-by. I had far better stay at home!"

The agonized way in which she poured this out as if it burst of itself from her suppressed heart, made it difficult for Clennam to keep the tears from his eyes as he saw and heard her.

"Don't call it home, my child!" he entreated. "It is always painful to me to hear you call it home."

"But it is home! What else can I call home? Why should I ever forget it for a single moment?"

"You never do, dear Little Dorrit, in any good and true service."

"I hope not, O I hope not! But it is better for me to stay there; much better, much more dutiful, much

happier. Please don't go with me, let me go by myself. Good-bý, God bless you. Thank you, thank you."

He felt that it was better to respect her entreaty, and did not move while her slight form went quickly away from him. When it had fluttered out of sight, he turned his face towards the water, and stood thinking.

She would have been distressed at any time by this discovery of the letters ; but so much so, and in that unrestrainable way ?

No.

When she had seen her father begging with his thread-bare disguise on, when she had entreated him not to give her father money, she had been distressed, but not like this. Something had made her keenly and additionally sensitive just now. Now, was there some one in the hopeless unattainable distance ? Or had the suspicion been brought into his mind, by his own associations of the troubled river running beneath the bridge with the same river higher up, its changeless tune upon the prow of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the peaceful flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet ?

He thought of his poor child, Little Dorrit, for a long time there ; he thought of her going home ; he thought of her in the night ; he thought of her when the day came round again. And the poor child Little Dorrit thought of him — too faithfully, ah, too faithfully ! — in the shadow of the Marshalsea wall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MACHINERY IN MOTION.

MR. MEAGLES bestirred himself with such prompt activity in the matter of the negotiation with Daniel Doyce which Clennam had intrusted to him, that he soon brought it into business train, and called on Clennam at nine o'clock one morning to make his report.

"Doyce is highly gratified by your good opinion," he opened the business by saying, "and desires nothing so much as that you should examine the affairs of the Works for yourself, and entirely understand them. He has handed me the keys of all his books and papers — here they are jingling in this pocket — and the only charge he has given me is, 'let Mr. Clennam have the means of putting himself on a perfect equality with me as to knowing whatever I know. If it should come to nothing after all, he will respect my confidence. Unless I was sure of that to begin with, I should have nothing to do with him.' And there, you see," said Mr. Meagles, "you have Daniel Doyce all over."

"A very honorable character."

"Oh yes, to be sure. Not a doubt of it. Odd, but very honorable. Very odd though. Now, would you believe, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles, with a hearty enjoyment of his friend's eccentricity, "that I had a whole morning in What's-his-name Yard —"

"Bleeding Heart?"

"A whole morning in Bleeding Heart Yard, before I could induce him to pursue the subject at all?"

"How was that?"

"How was that, my friend? I no sooner mentioned your name in connection with it, than he declared off."

"Declared off, on my account?"

"I no sooner mentioned your name, Clennam, than he said 'that will never do!' What did he mean by that? I asked him. No matter, Meagles; that would never do. Why would it never do? You'll hardly believe it, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles, laughing within himself, "but it came out that it would never do, because you and he, walking down to Twickenham together, had glided into a friendly conversation, in the course of which he had referred to his intention of taking a partner, supposing at the time that you were as firmly and finally settled as Saint Paul's Cathedral. 'Whereas,' says he, 'Mr. Clennam might now believe, if I entertained his proposition, that I had a sinister and designing motive in what was open free speech. Which I can't bear,' says he, 'which I really am too proud to bear.'"

"I should as soon suspect —"

"Of course you would," interrupted Mr. Meagles, "and so I told him. But it took a morning to scale that wall; and I doubt if any other man than myself (he likes me of old), could have got his leg over it. Well, Clennam. This business-like obstacle surmounted, he then stipulated that before resuming with you I should look over the books, and form my own opinion. I looked over the books, and formed my own opinion. 'Is it, on the whole, for, or against?' says he. 'For,' says I. 'Then,' says he, 'you may now, my good friend, give Mr. Clennam

the means of forming his opinion. To enable him to do which, without bias and with perfect freedom, I shall go out of town for a week.' And he's gone," said Mr. Meagles; "that's the rich conclusion of the thing."

"Leaving me," said Clennam, "with a high sense, I must say, of his candor and his —"

"Oddity," Mr. Meagles struck in. "I should think so!"

It was not exactly the word on Clennam's lips, but he forbore to interrupt his good-humored friend.

"And now," added Mr. Meagles, "you can begin to look into matters as soon as you think proper. I have undertaken to explain where you may want explanation, but to be strictly impartial, and to do nothing more."

They began their perquisitions in Bleeding Heart Yard that same forenoon. Little peculiarities were easily to be detected by experienced eyes in Mr. Doyce's way of managing his affairs, but they almost always involved some ingenious simplification of a difficulty, and some plain road to the desired end. That his papers were in arrear, and that he stood in need of assistance to develop the capacity of his business, was clear enough; but all the results of his undertakings during many years were distinctly set forth, and were ascertainable with ease. Nothing had been done for the purposes of the pending investigation; everything was in its genuine working dress, and in a certain honest rugged order. The calculations and entries, in his own hand, of which there were many, were bluntly written, and with no very neat precision; but were always plain, and directed straight to the purpose. It occurred to Arthur that a far more elaborate and taking show of business — such as the records of the Circumlocution Office made perhaps

— might be far less serviceable, as being meant to be far less intelligible.

Three or four days of steady application rendered him master of all the facts it was essential to become acquainted with. Mr. Meagles was at hand the whole time, always ready to illuminate any dim place with the bright little safety-lamp belonging to the scales and scoop. Between them, they agreed upon the sum it would be fair to offer for the purchase of a half share in the business, and then Mr. Meagles unsealed a paper in which Daniel Doyce had noted the amount at which he valued it; which was even something less. Thus, when Daniel came back, he found the affair as good as concluded.

"And I may now avow, Mr. Clennam," said he, with a cordial shake of the hand, "that if I had looked high and low for a partner, I believe I could not have found one more to my mind."

"I say the same," said Clennam.

"And I say of both of you," added Mr. Meagles, "that you are well matched. You keep him in check, Clennam, with your common sense, and you stick to the Works, Dan, with your —"

"Uncommon sense?" suggested Daniel, with his quiet smile.

"You may call it so, if you like — and each of you will be a right hand to the other. Here's my own right hand upon it, as a practical man, to both of you."

The purchase was completed within a month. It left Arthur in possession of private personal means not exceeding a few hundred pounds; but it opened to him an active and promising career. The three friends dined together on the auspicious occasion; the factory and the factory wives and children made holiday and dined too;

even Bleeding Heart Yard dined and was full of meat. Two months had barely gone by in all, when Bleeding Heart Yard had become so familiar with short-commons again that the treat was forgotten there ; when nothing seemed new in the partnership but the paint of the inscription on the door-post, DOYCE AND CLENNAM ; when it appeared even to Clennam himself, that he had had the affairs of the firm in his mind for years.

The little counting-house reserved for his own occupation, was a room of wood and glass at the end of a long, low workshop, filled with benches, and vices, and tools, and straps, and wheels ; which, when they were in gear with the steam-engine, went tearing round as though they had a suicidal mission to grind the business to dust and tear the factory to pieces. A communication of great trapdoors in the floor and roof with the workshop above and the workshop below, made a shaft of light in this perspective, which brought to Clennam's mind the child's old picture-book, where similar rays were the witnesses of Abel's murder. The noises were sufficiently removed and shut out from the counting-house to blend into a busy hum, interspersed with periodical clinks and thumps. The patient figures at work were swarthy with the filings of iron and steel that danced on every bench and bubbled up through every chink in the planking. The workshop was arrived at by a step-ladder from the outer yard below, where it served as a shelter for the large grindstone where tools were sharpened. The whole had at once a fanciful and practical air in Clennam's eyes which was a welcome change ; and, as often as he raised them from his first work of getting the array of business documents into perfect order, he glanced at these things with a feeling of pleasure in his pursuit that was new to him

Raising his eyes thus one day, he was surprised to see a bonnet laboring up the step-ladder. The unusual apparition was followed by another bonnet. He then perceived that the first bonnet was on the head of Mr. F's Aunt, and that the second bonnet was on the head of Flora, who seemed to have propelled her legacy up the steep ascent with considerable difficulty.

Though not altogether enraptured at the sight of these visitors, Clennam lost no time in opening the counting-house door, and extricating them from the workshop; a rescue which was rendered the more necessary by Mr. F's Aunt already stumbling over some impediment, and menacing steam-power as an Institution with a stony reticule she carried.

"Good gracious, Arthur, — I should say Mr. Clennam, far more proper, — the climb we have had to get up here and how ever to get down again without a fire-escape and Mr. F's Aunt slipping through the steps and bruised all over and you in the machinery and foundry way too only think, and never told us!"

Thus Flora, out of breath. Meanwhile, Mr. F's Aunt rubbed her esteemed insteps with her umbrella, and vindictively glared.

"Most unkind never to have come back to see us since that day, though naturally it was not to be expected that there should be any attraction at *our* house and you were much more pleasantly engaged, that's pretty certain, and is she fair or dark blue eyes or black I wonder, not that I expect that she should be anything but a perfect contrast to me in all particulars for I am a disappointment as I very well know and you are quite right to be devoted no doubt though what I am saying Arthur never mind I hardly know myself Good gracious!"

By this time he had placed chairs for them in the counting-house. As Flora dropped into hers, she bestowed the old look upon him.

"And to think of Doyce and Clennam, and who Doyce can be," said Flora; "delightful man no doubt and married perhaps or perhaps a daughter, now has he really? then one understands the partnership and sees it all, don't tell me anything about it for I know I have no claim to ask the question the golden chain that once was forged, being snapped and very proper."

Flora put her hand tenderly on his, and gave him another of the youthful glances.

"Dear Arthur—force of habit, Mr. Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstances—I must beg to be excused for taking the liberty of this intrusion but I thought I might so far presume upon old times forever faded never more to bloom as to call with Mr. F's Aunt to congratulate and offer best wishes, A great deal superior to China not to be denied and much nearer though higher up!"

"I am very happy to see you," said Clennam, "and I thank you, Flora, very much for your kind remembrance."

"More than I can say myself at any rate," returned Flora, "for I might have been dead and buried twenty distinct times over and no doubt whatever should have been before you had genuinely remembered Me or anything like it in spite of which one last remark I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer—"

"My dear Mrs. Finching," Arthur remonstrated in alarm.

"Oh not that disagreeable name, say Flora!"

"Flora, is it worth troubling yourself afresh to enter

into explanations? I assure you none are needed. I am satisfied — I am perfectly satisfied.”

A diversion was occasioned here, by Mr. F's Aunt making the following inexorable and awful statement :

“ There's mile-stones on the Dover road ! ”

With such mortal hostility towards the human race did she discharge this missile, that Clennam was quite at a loss how to defend himself ; the rather as he had been already perplexed in his mind by the honor of a visit from this venerable lady, when it was plain she held him in the utmost abhorrence. He could not but look at her with disconcertment, as she sat breathing bitterness and scorn, and staring leagues away. Flora, however, received the remark as if it had been of a most apposite and agreeable nature ; approvingly observing aloud that Mr. F's Aunt had a great deal of spirit. Stimulated either by this compliment, or by her burning indignation, that illustrious woman then added, “ Let him meet it if he can ! ” And, with a rigid movement of her stony reticule (an appendage of great size, and of a fossil appearance), indicated that Clennam was the unfortunate person at whom the challenge was hurled.

“ One last remark,” resumed Flora, “ I was going to say I wish to make one last explanation I wish to offer, Mr. F's Aunt and myself would not have intruded on business hours Mr. F having been in business and though the wine trade still business is equally business call it what you will and business habits are just the same as witness Mr. F himself who had his slippers always on the mat at ten minutes before six in the afternoon and his boots inside the fender at ten minutes before eight in the morning to the moment in all weathers light or dark — would not therefore have intruded without a

motive which being kindly meant it may be hoped will be kindly taken Arthur, Mr. Clennam far more proper, even Doyce and Clennam probably more business-like."

"Pray say nothing in the way of apology," Arthur entreated. "You are always welcome."

"Very polite of you to say so Arthur — cannot remember Mr. Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times forever fled, and so true it is that oft in the stillly night ere slumber's chain has bound people, fond memory brings the light of other days around people — very polite but more polite than true I am afraid, for to go into the machinery business without so much as sending a line or a card to papa — I don't say me though there was a time but that is past and stern reality has now my gracious never mind — does not look like it you must confess."

Even Flora's commas seemed to have fled on this occasion; she was so much more disjointed and voluble than in the preceding interview.

"Though indeed," she hurried on, "nothing else is to be expected and why should it be expected, and if it's not to be expected why should it be, and I am far from blaming you or any one, When your mamma and my papa worried us to death and severed the golden bowl — I mean bond but I dare say you know what I mean and if you don't you don't lose much and care just as little I will venture to add — when they severed the golden bond that bound us and threw us into fits of crying on the sofa nearly choked at least myself everything was changed and in giving my hand to Mr. F I know I did so with my eyes open but he was so very unsettled and in such low spirits that he had distractedly alluded to the

river if not oil of something from the chemist's and I did it for the best."

"My good Flora, we settled that before. It was all quite right."

"It's perfectly clear you think so," returned Flora, "for you take it very coolly, if I hadn't known it to be China I should have guessed myself the Polar regions, dear Mr. Clennam you are right however and I cannot blame you but as to Doyce and Clennam papa's property being about here we heard it from Pancks and but for him we never should have heard one word about it I am satisfied."

"No no, don't say that."

"What nonsense not to say it Arthur — Doyce and Clennam — easier and less trying to me than Mr. Clennam — when I know it and you know it too and can't deny it."

"But I do deny it, Flora. I should soon have made you a friendly visit."

"Ah!" said Flora, tossing her head. "I dare say!" and she gave him another of the old looks. "However when Pancks told us I made up my mind that Mr. F's Aunt and I would come and call because when papa — which was before that — happened to mention her name to me and to say that you were interested in her I said at the moment Good gracious why not have her here then when there's anything to do instead of putting it out."

"When you say Her," observed Clennam, by this time pretty well bewildered, "do you mean Mr. F's —"

"My goodness, Arthur — Doyce and Clennam really easier to me with old remembrances — who ever heard of Mr. F's Aunt doing needlework and going out by the day!"

"Going out by the day! Do you speak of Little Dorrit?"

"Why yes of course," returned Flora! "and of all the strangest names I ever heard the strangest, like a place down in the country with a turnpike, or a favorite pony or a puppy or a bird or something from a seed-shop to be put in a garden or a flower-pot and come up speckled."

"Then, Flora," said Arthur, with a sudden interest in the conversation, "Mr. Casby was so kind as to mention Little Dorrit to you, was he? What did he say?"

"Oh you know what papa is," rejoined Flora, "and how aggravatingly he sits looking beautiful and turning his thumbs over and over one another till he makes one giddy if one keeps one's eyes upon him, he said when we were talking of you — I don't know who began the subject Arthur (Doyce and Clennam) but I am sure it wasn't me, at least I hope not but you really must excuse my confessing more on that point."

"Certainly," said Arthur. "By all means."

"You are very ready," pouted Flora, coming to a sudden stop in a captivating bashfulness, "that I must admit, Papa said you had spoken of her in an earnest way and I said what I have told you and that's all."

"That's all?" said Arthur, a little disappointed.

"Except that when Pancks told us of your having embarked in this business and with difficulty persuaded us that it was really you I said to Mr. F's Aunt then we would come and ask you if it would be agreeable to all parties that she should be engaged at our house when required for I know she often goes to your mamma's and I know that your mamma has a very touchy temper Arthur — Doyce and Clennam — or I never might have married

Mr. F and might have been at this hour but I am running into nonsense."

"It was very kind of you, Flora, to think of this."

Poor Flora rejoined with a plain sincerity which became her better than her youngest glances, that she was glad he thought so. She said it with so much heart, that Clennam would have given a great deal to buy his old character of her on the spot, and throw it and the mermaid away forever.

"I think, Flora," he said, "that the employment you can give Little Dorrit, and the kindness you can show her" —

"Yes and I will," said Flora, quickly.

"I am sure of it — will be a great assistance and support to her. I do not feel that I have the right to tell you what I know of her, for I acquired the knowledge confidentially, and under circumstances that bind me to silence. But I have an interest in the little creature, and a respect for her that I cannot express to you. Her life has been one of such trial and devotion, and such quiet goodness, as you can scarcely imagine. I can hardly think of her, far less speak of her without feeling moved. Let that feeling represent what I could tell you, and commit her to your friendliness with my thanks."

Once more he put out his hand frankly to poor Flora; once more poor Flora couldn't accept it frankly, found it worth nothing openly, must make the old intrigue and mystery of it. As much to her own enjoyment as to his dismay, she covered it with a corner of her shawl as she took it. Then, looking towards the glass front of the counting-house, and seeing two figures approaching, she cried with infinite relish, "Papa! Hush, Arthur, for

Mercy's sake!" and tottered back to her chair with an amazing imitation of being in danger of swooning, in the dread surprise and maidenly flutter of her spirits.

The Patriarch meanwhile came inanely beaming towards the counting-house, in the wake of Pancks. Pancks opened the door for him, towed him in, and retired to his own moorings in a corner.

"I heard from Flora," said the Patriarch, with his benevolent smile, "that she was coming to call, coming to call. And being out, I thought I'd come also, thought I'd come also."

The benign wisdom he infused into this declaration (not of itself profound), by means of his blue eyes, his shining head, and his long white hair, was most impressive. It seemed worth putting down among the noblest sentiments enunciated by the best of men. Also, when he said to Clennam, seating himself in the proffered chair, "And you are in a new business, Mr. Clennam? I wish you well, sir, I wish you well!" he seemed to have done benevolent wonders.

"Mrs. Finching has been telling me, sir," said Arthur, after making his acknowledgments; the relict of the late Mr. F meanwhile protesting, with a gesture, against his use of that respectable name; "that she hopes occasionally to employ the young needlewoman you recommended to my mother. For which I have been thanking her."

The Patriarch turning his head in a lumbering way towards Pancks, that assistant put up the note-book in which he had been absorbed, and took him in tow.

"You didn't recommend her, you know," said Pancks; "how could you? You knew nothing about her, you

didn't. The name was mentioned to you, and you passed it on. That's what *you* did."

"Well!" said Clennam. "As she justifies any recommendation, it is much the same thing."

"You are glad she turns out well," said Pancks, "but it wouldn't have been your fault if she had turned out ill. The credit's not yours as it is, and the blame wouldn't have been yours as it might have been. You have no guarantee. You knew nothing about her."

"You are not acquainted, then," said Arthur, hazarding a random question, "with any of her family?"

"Acquainted with any of her family?" returned Pancks. "How should you be acquainted with any of her family? You never heard of 'em. You can't be acquainted with people you never heard of, can you? You should think not!"

All this time the Patriarch sat serenely smiling; nodding or shaking his head benevolently, as the case required.

"As to being a reference," said Pancks, "you know in a general way, what being a reference means. It's all your eye, that is! Look at your tenants down the Yard here. They'd all be references for one another, if you'd let 'em. What would be the good of letting 'em? It's no satisfaction to be done by two men instead of one. One's enough. A person who can't pay, gets another person who can't pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs, getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don't make either of them able to do a walking-match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you

don't want any." Mr. Pancks concluded by blowing off that steam of his.

A momentary silence that ensued was broken by Mr. F's Aunt, who had been sitting upright in a cataleptic state since her last public remark. She now underwent a violent twitch, calculated to produce a startling effect on the nerves of the uninitiated, and with the deadliest animosity observed:

"You can't make a head and brains out of a brass knob with nothing in it. You couldn't do it when your Uncle George was living; much less when he's dead."

Mr. Pancks was not slow to reply, with his usual calmness, "Indeed, ma'am! Bless my soul! I'm surprised to hear it." Despite his presence of mind, however, the speech of Mr. F's Aunt produced a depressing effect on the little assembly; firstly, because it was impossible to disguise that Clennam's unoffending head was the particular temple of reason depreciated; and secondly, because nobody ever knew on these occasions whose Uncle George was referred to, or what spectral presence might be invoked under that appellation.

Therefore Flora said, though still not without a certain boastfulness and triumph in her legacy, that Mr. F's Aunt was "very lively to-day, and she thought they had better go." But, Mr. F's Aunt proved so lively as to take the suggestion in unexpected dudgeon and declare that she would not go; adding, with several injurious expressions, that if "He"—too evidently meaning Clennam—wanted to get rid of her, "let him chuck her out of winder;" and urgently expressing her desire to see "Him" perform that ceremony.

In this dilemma, Mr. Pancks, whose resources appeared equal to any emergency in the Patriarchal

waters, slipped on his hat, slipped out at the counting-house door, and slipped in again a moment afterwards with an artificial freshness upon him, as if he had been in the country for some weeks. "Why, bless my heart, ma'am!" said Mr. Pancks, rubbing up his hair in great astonishment, "is that you? How do you *do*, ma'am? You are looking charming to-day! I am delighted to see you. Favor me with your arm, ma'am; we'll have a little walk together, you and me, if you'll honor me with your company." And so escorted Mr. F's Aunt down the private staircase of the counting-house, with great gallantry and success. The patriarchal Mr. Casby then rose with the air of having done it himself, and blandly followed: leaving his daughter, as she followed in her turn, to remark to her former lover in a distracted whisper (which she very much enjoyed), that they had drained the cup of life to the dregs; and further to hint mysteriously that the late Mr. F was at the bottom of it.

Alone again, Clennam became a prey to his old doubts in reference to his mother and Little Dorrit, and revolved the old thoughts and suspicions. They were all in his mind, blending themselves with the duties he was mechanically discharging, when a shadow on his papers caused him to look up for the cause. The cause was Mr. Pancks. With his hat thrown back upon his ears as if his wiry prongs of hair had darted up like springs and cast it off, with his jet-black beads of eyes inquisitively sharp, with the fingers of his right hand in his mouth that he might bite the nails, and with the fingers of his left hand in reserve in his pocket for another course, Mr. Pancks cast his shadow through the glass upon the books and papers.

Mr. Pancks asked, with a little inquiring twist of his head, if he might come in again? Clennam replied with a nod of his head in the affirmative. Mr. Pancks worked his way in, came alongside the desk, made himself fast by leaning his arms upon it, and started conversation with a puff and a snort.

"Mr. F's Aunt is appeased, I hope?" said Clennam.

"All right, sir," said Pancks.

"I am so unfortunate as to have awakened a strong animosity in the breast of that lady," said Clennam. "Do you know why?"

"Does *she* know why?" said Pancks.

"I suppose not."

"I suppose not," said Pancks.

He took out his note-book, opened it, shut it, dropped it into his hat, which was beside him on the desk, and looked in at it as it lay at the bottom of the hat: all with a great appearance of consideration.

"Mr. Clennam," he then began, "I am in want of information, sir."

"Connected with this firm?" asked Clennam.

"No," said Pancks.

"With what then, Mr. Pancks? That is to say, assuming that you want it of me."

"Yes, sir; yes, I want it of you," said Pancks, "if I can persuade you to furnish it. A, B, C, D. DA, DE, DI, DO. Dictionary order. Dorrit. That's the name, sir."

Mr. Pancks blew off his peculiar noise again, and fell to at his right-hand nails. Arthur looked searchingly at him; he returned the look.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Pancks."

"That's the name that I want to know about."

"And what do you want to know?"

"Whatever you can and will tell me." This comprehensive summary of his desires was not discharged without some heavy laboring on the part of Mr. Pancks's machinery.

"This is a singular visit, Mr. Pancks. It strikes me as rather extraordinary that you should come, with such an object, to me."

"It may be all extraordinary together," returned Pancks. "It may be out of the ordinary course, and yet be business. In short, it is business. I am a man of business. What business have I in this present world, except to stick to business? No business."

With his former doubt whether this dry hard personage were quite in earnest, Clennam again turned his eyes attentively upon his face. It was as scrubby and dingy as ever, and as eager and quick as ever, and he could see nothing lurking in it that was at all expressive of a latent mockery that had seemed to strike upon his ear in the voice.

"Now," said Pancks, "to put this business on its own footing, it's not my proprietor's."

"Do you refer to Mr. Casby as your proprietor?"

Pancks nodded. "My proprietor. Put a case. Say, at my proprietor's I hear name—name of young person Mr. Clennam wants to serve. Say, name first mentioned to my proprietor by Plornish in the Yard. Say, I go to Plornish. Say, I ask Plornish as a matter of business, for information. Say, Plornish, though six weeks in arrear to my proprietor, declines. Say, Mrs. Plornish declines. Say, both refer to Mr. Clennam. Put the case."

"Well?"

"Well, sir," returned Pancks, "say, I come to him. Say, here I am."

With those prongs of hair sticking up all over his head, and his breath coming and going very hard and short, the busy Pancks fell back a step (in Tug metaphor, took half a turn astern) as if to show his dingy hull complete, then forged ahead again, and directed his quick glance by turns into his hat where his note-book was, and into Clennam's face.

"Mr. Pancks, not to trespass on your ground of mystery, I will be as plain with you as I can. Let me ask two questions. First —"

"All right!" said Pancks, holding up his dirty forefinger with its broken nail. "I see! 'What's your motive!'"

"Exactly."

"Motive," said Pancks, "good. Nothing to do with my proprietor; not statable at present, ridiculous to state at present; but good. Desiring to serve young person, name of Dorrit," said Pancks, with his forefinger still up as a caution. "Better admit motive to be good."

"Secondly, and lastly, what do you want to know?"

Mr. Pancks fished up his note-book before the question was put, and buttoning it with care in an inner breast pocket, and looking straight at Clennam all the time, replied with a pause and a puff, "I want supplementary information of any sort."

Clennam could not withhold a smile, as the panting little steam-tug, so useful to that unwieldy ship the *Casby*, waited on and watched him as if it were seeking an opportunity of running in and rifling him of all it wanted, before he could resist its manœuvres; though there was

that in Mr. Pancks's eagerness, too, which awakened many wondering speculations in his mind. After a little consideration, he resolved to supply Mr. Pancks with such leading information as it was in his power to impart to him ; well knowing that Mr. Pancks, if he failed in his present research, was pretty sure to find other means of getting it."

He, therefore, first requesting Mr. Pancks to remember his voluntary declaration that his proprietor had no part in the disclosure, and that his own intentions were good (two declarations which that coaly little gentleman with the greatest ardor repeated), openly told him that as to the Dorrit lineage or former place of habitation he had no information to communicate, and that his knowledge of the family did not extend beyond the fact that it appeared to be now reduced to five members ; namely, to two brothers, of whom one was single, and one a widower with three children. The ages of the whole family he made known to Mr. Pancks, as nearly as he could guess at them ; and finally he described to him the position of the Father of the Marshalsea, and the course of time and events through which he had become invested with that character. To all this, Mr. Pancks, snorting and blowing in a more and more portentous manner as he became more interested, listened with great attention ; appearing to derive the most agreeable sensations from the painfulest parts of the narrative, and particularly to be quite charmed by the account of William Dorrit's long imprisonment.

"In conclusion, Mr. Pancks," said Arthur, "I have but to say this. I have reasons beyond a personal regard, for speaking as little as I can of the Dorrit family, particularly at my mother's house" (Mr. Pancks nodded), "and

for knowing as much as I can. So devoted a man of business as you are — eh?"

For, Mr. Pancks had suddenly made that blowing effort with unusual force.

"It's nothing," said Pancks.

"So devoted a man of business as yourself has a perfect understanding of a fair bargain. I wish to make a fair bargain with you, that you shall enlighten me concerning the Dorrit family, when you have it in your power, as I have enlightened you. It may not give you a very flattering idea of my business habits, that I failed to make my terms beforehand," continued Clennam; "but I prefer to make them a point of honor. I have seen so much business done on sharp principles that, to tell you the truth, Mr. Pancks, I am tired of them."

Mr. Pancks laughed. "It's a bargain, sir," said he. "You shall find me stick to it."

After that, he stood a little while looking at Clennam, and biting his ten nails all round; evidently while he fixed in his mind what he had been told, and went over it carefully before the means of supplying a gap in his memory should be no longer at hand. "It's all right," he said at last, "and now I'll wish you good day, as it's collecting-day in the Yard. By the by, though. A lame foreigner with a stick."

"Ay, ay. You do take a reference sometimes, I see?" said Clennam.

"When he can pay, sir," replied Pancks. "Take all you can get, and keep back all you can't be forced to give up. That's business. The lame foreigner with the stick wants a top room down the Yard. Is he good for it?"

"I am," said Clennam, "and I will answer for him."

"That's enough. What I must have of Bleeding

Heart Yard," said Pancks, making a note of the case in his book, "is my bond. I want my bond, you see. Pay up, or produce your property! That's the watchword down the Yard. The lame foreigner with the stick represented that you sent him; but he could represent (as far as that goes) that the Great Mugul sent him. He has been in the Hospital, I believe?"

"Yes. Through having met with an accident. He is only just now discharged."

"It's pauperizing a man, sir, I have been shown, to let him into a Hospital?" said Pancks. And again blew off that remarkable sound.

"I have been shown so too," said Clennam, coldly.

Mr. Pancks, being by that time quite ready for a start, got under steam in a moment, and, without any other signal or ceremony, was snorting down the step-ladder and working into Bleeding Heart Yard, before he seemed to be well out of the counting-house.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Bleeding Heart Yard was in consternation, as the grim Pancks cruised in it; haranguing the inhabitants on their backslidings in respect of payment, demanding his bond, breathing notices to quit and executions, running down defaulters, sending a swell of terror on before him, and leaving it in his wake. Knots of people, impelled by a fatal attraction, lurked outside any house in which he was known to be, listening for fragments of his discourses to the inmates; and, when he was rumored to be coming down the stairs, often could not disperse so quickly but that he would be prematurely in among them, demanding their own arrears, and rooting them to the spot. Throughout the remainder of the day, Mr. Pancks's What were they up to? and What did they mean by it?

sounded all over the Yard. Mr. Pancks wouldn't hear of excuses, wouldn't hear of complaints, wouldn't hear of repairs, wouldn't hear of anything but unconditional money down. Perspiring and puffing and darting about in eccentric directions, and becoming hotter and dingier every moment, he lashed the tide of the Yard into a most agitated and turbid state. It had not settled down into calm water again, full two hours after he had been seen fuming away on the horizon at the top of the steps.

There were several small assemblages of the Bleeding Hearts at the popular points of meeting in the Yard that night, among whom it was universally agreed that Mr. Pancks was a hard man to have to do with ; and that it was much to be regretted, so it was, that a gentleman like Mr. Casby should put his rents in his hands, and never know him in his true light. For (said the Bleeding Hearts), if a gentleman with that head of hair and them eyes took his rents into his own hands, ma'am, there would be none of this worriting and wearing, and things would be very different.

At which identical evening hour and minute, the Patriarch — who had floated serenely through the Yard in the forenoon before the hurrying began, with the express design of getting up this trustfulness in his shining bumps and silken locks — at which identical hour and minute, that first-rate humbug of a thousand guns was heavily floundering in the little Dock of his exhausted Tug at home, and was saying, as he turned his thumbs :

“A very bad day's work, Pancks, very bad day's work. It seems to me, sir, and I must insist on making the observation forcibly, in justice to myself, that you ought to have got much more money, much more money.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORTUNE-TELLING.

LITTLE DORRIT received a call that same evening from Mr. Plornish, who, having intimated that he wished to speak to her, privately, in a series of coughs so very noticeable as to favor the idea that her father, as regarded her seamstress occupation, was an illustration of the axiom that there are no such stone-blind men as those who will not see, obtained an audience with her on the common staircase outside the door.

"There's been a lady at our place to-day, Miss Dorrit," Plornish growled, "and another one along with her as is a old wixen if ever I met with such. The way she snapped a person's head off, dear me!"

The mild Plornish was at first quite unable to get his mind away from Mr. F's Aunt. "For," said he, to excuse himself, "she is, I do assure you, the winegariest party!"

At length, by a great effort, he detached himself from the subject sufficiently to observe:

"But she's neither here nor there just at present. The other lady, she's Mr. Casby's daughter; and if Mr. Casby a'n't well off, none better, it a'n't through any fault of Pancks. For, as to Pancks, he does, he really does, he does indeed!"

Mr. Plornish, after his usual manner, was a little obscure, but conscientiously emphatic.

"And what she come to our place for," he pursued, "was to leave word that if Miss Dorrit would step up to that card—which it's Mr. Casby's house that is, and Pancks he has a office at the back, where he really does, beyond belief—she would be glad for to engage her. She was an old and a dear friend, she said particular, of Mr. Clennam, and hoped for to prove herself a useful friend to *his* friend. Them was her words. Wishing to know whether Miss Dorrit could come to-morrow morning, I said I would see you, Miss, and inquire, and look round there to-night to say yes, or, if you was engaged to-morrow, when."

"I can go to-morrow, thank you," said Little Dorrit. "This is very kind of you, but you are always kind."

Mr. Plornish, with a modest disavowal of his merits, opened the room-door for her readmission, and followed her in with such an exceedingly bald pretence of not having been out at all, that her father might have observed it without being very suspicious. In his affable unconsciousness, however, he took no heed. Plornish, after a little conversation, in which he blended his former duty as a Collegian with his present privilege as a humble outside friend, qualified again by his low estate as a plasterer, took his leave; making the tour of the prison before he left, and looking on at a game of skittles, with the mixed feelings of an old inhabitant who had his private reasons for believing that it might be his destiny to come back again.

Early in the morning, Little Dorrit, leaving Maggy in high domestic trust, set off for the Patriarchal tent. She went by the Iron Bridge, though it cost her a penny, and walked more slowly in that part of her journey than

in any other. At five minutes before eight, her hand was on the Patriarchal knocker, which was quite as high as she could reach.

She gave Mrs. Finching's card to the young woman who opened the door, and the young woman told her that "Miss Flora" — Flora having, on her return to the parental roof, reinvested herself with the title under which she had lived there — was not yet out of her bedroom, but she was to please to walk up into Miss Flora's sitting-room. She walked up into Miss Flora's sitting-room, as in duty bound, and there found a breakfast-table comfortably laid for two, with a supplementary tray upon it laid for one. The young woman, disappearing for a few moments, returned to say that she was to please to take a chair by the fire, and to take off her bonnet and make herself at home. But Little Dorrit being bashful, and not used to make herself at home on such occasions, felt at a loss how to do it; so she was still sitting near the door with her bonnet on, when Flora came in in a hurry, half an hour afterwards.

Flora was so sorry to have kept her waiting, and good gracious why did she sit out there in the cold when she had expected to find her by the fire reading the paper, and hadn't that heedless girl given her the message then, and had she really been in her bonnet all this time, and pray for goodness sake let Flora take it off! Flora taking it off in the best-natured manner in the world, was so struck by the face disclosed, that she said, "Why, what a good little thing you are, my dear!" and pressed the face between her hands like the gentlest of women.

It was the word and the action of a moment. Little Dorrit had hardly time to think how kind it was, when

Flora dashed at the breakfast-table, full of business, and plunged over head and ears into loquacity.

"Really so sorry that I should happen to be late on this morning of all mornings because my intention and my wish was to be ready to meet you when you came in and to say that any one that interested Arthur Clennam half so much must interest me and that I gave you the heartiest welcome and was so glad, instead of which they never called me and there I still am snoring I dare say if the truth was known and if you don't like either cold fowl or hot boiled ham which many people don't I dare say besides Jews and theirs are scruples of conscience which we must all respect though I must say I wish they had them equally strong when they sell us false articles for real that certainly a'n't worth the money I shall be quite vexed," said Flora.

Little Dorrit thanked her, and said, shyly, bread and butter and tea was all she usually —

"Oh nonsense my dear child I can never hear of that," said Flora, turning on the urn in the most reckless manner, and making herself wink by splashing hot water into her eyes as she bent down to look into the tea-pot. "You are come here on the footing of a friend and companion you know if you will let me take that liberty and I should be ashamed of myself indeed if you could come here upon any other, besides which Arthur Clennam spoke in such terms — you are tired my dear."

"No ma'am."

"You turn so pale you have walked too far before breakfast and I dare say live a great way off and ought to have had a ride," said Flora, "dear dear is there anything that would do you good?"

"Indeed I am quite well, ma'am. I thank you again and again, but I am quite well."

"Then take your tea at once I beg," said Flora, "and this wing of fowl and bit of ham, don't mind me or wait for me because I always carry in this tray myself to Mr. F's Aunt who breakfasts in bed and a charming old lady too and very clever, Portrait of Mr. F behind the door and very like though too much forehead and as to a pillar with a marble pavement and balustrades and a mountain I never saw him near it nor not likely in the wine trade, excellent man but not at all in that way."

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait, very imperfectly following the references to that work of art.

"Mr. F was so devoted to me that he never could bear me out of his sight," said Flora, "though of course I am unable to say how long that might have lasted if he hadn't been cut short while I was a new broom, worthy man but not poetical manly prose but not romance."

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait again. The artist had given it a head that would have been, in an intellectual point of view, top-heavy for Shakspeare.

"Romance, however," Flora went on, busily arranging Mr. F's Aunt's toast, "as I openly said to Mr. F when he proposed to me and you will be surprised to hear that he proposed seven times once in a hackney-coach once in a boat once in a pew once on a donkey at Tunbridge Wells and the rest on his knees, Romance was fled with the early days of Arthur Clennam, our parents tore us asunder we became marble and stern reality usurped the throne, Mr. F said very much to his credit that he was perfectly aware of it and even preferred that state of things accordingly the word was

spoken the fiat went forth and such is life you see my dear and yet we do not break but bend, pray make a good breakfast while I go in with the tray."

She disappeared, leaving Little Dorrit to ponder over the meaning of her scattered words. She soon came back again; and at last began to take her own breakfast, talking all the while.

"You see my dear," said Flora, measuring out a spoonful or two of some brown liquid that smelt like brandy, and putting it into her tea, "I am obliged to be careful to follow the directions of my medical man though the flavor is anything but agreeable being a poor creature and it may be have never recovered the shock received in youth from too much giving way to crying in the next room when separated from Arthur, have you known him long?"

As soon as Little Dorrit comprehended that she had been asked this question — for which time was necessary, the galloping pace of her new patroness having left her far behind — she answered that she had known Mr. Clennam ever since his return.

"To be sure you couldn't have known him before unless you had been in China or had corresponded neither of which is likely," returned Flora, "for travelling-people usually get more or less mahogany and you are not at all so and as to corresponding what about? that's very true unless tea, so it was at his mother's was it really that you knew him first, highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severe — ought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask."

"Mrs. Clennam has been kind to me," said Little Dorrit.

"Really? I am sure I am glad to hear it because as

Arthur's mother it's naturally pleasant to my feelings to have a better opinion of her than I had before, though what she thinks of me when I run on as I am certain to do and she sits glowering at me like Fate in a go-cart — shocking comparison really — invalid and not her fault — I never know or can imagine."

"Shall I find my work anywhere, ma'am?" asked Little Dorrit, looking timidly about; "can I get it?"

"You industrious little fairy," returned Flora, taking, in another cup of tea, another of the doses prescribed by her medical man, "there's not the slightest hurry and it's better that we should begin by being confidential about our mutual friend — too cold a word for me at least I don't mean that, very proper expression mutual friend — than become through mere formalities not you but me like the Spartan boy with the fox biting him, which I hope you'll excuse my bringing up for of all the tiresome boys that will go tumbling into every sort of company that boy's the tiresomest."

Little Dorrit, her face very pale, sat down again to listen. "Hadn't I better work the while?" she asked. "I can work and attend too. I would rather, if I may."

Her earnestness was so expressive of her being uneasy without her work, that Flora answered, "Well my dear whatever you like best," and produced a basket of white handkerchiefs. Little Dorrit gladly put it by her side, took out her little pocket-housewife, threaded her needle, and began to hem.

"What nimble fingers you have," said Flora, "but are you sure you are well?"

"Oh yes, indeed!"

Flora put her feet upon the fender, and settled herself

for a thorough good romantic disclosure. She started off at score, tossing her head, sighing in the most demonstrative manner, making a great deal of use of her eyebrows, and occasionally, but not often, glancing at the quiet face that bent over the work.

"You must know my dear," said Flora, "but that I have no doubt you know already not only because I have already thrown it out in a general way but because I feel I carry it stamped in burning what's his names upon my brow that before I was introduced to the late Mr. F I had been engaged to Arthur Clennam — Mr. Clennam in public where reserve is necessary Arthur here — we were all in all to one another it was the morning of life it was bliss it was frenzy it was everything else of that sort in the highest degree, when rent asunder we turned to stone in which capacity Arthur went to China and I became the statue bride of the late Mr. F."

Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely.

"To paint," said she, "the emotions of that morning when all was marble within and Mr. F's Aunt followed in a glass coach which it stands to reason must have been in shameful repair or it never could have broken down two streets from the house and Mr. F's Aunt brought home like the fifth of November in a rush-bottomed chair I will not attempt, suffice it to say that the hollow form of breakfast took place in the dining-room down-stairs that papa partaking too freely of pickled salmon was ill for weeks and that Mr. F and myself went upon a continental tour to Calais where the people fought for us on the pier until they separated us though not forever that was not yet to be."

The statue bride, hardly pausing for breath, went on,

with the greatest complacency, in a rambling manner sometimes incidental to flesh and blood.

"I will draw a veil over that dreamy life, Mr. F was in good spirits his appetite was good he liked the cookery he considered the wine weak but palatable and all was well, we returned to the immediate neighborhood of Number Thirty Little Gosling Street London Docks and settled down, ere we had yet fully detected the housemaid in selling the feathers out of the spare bed Gout flying upwards soared with Mr. F to another sphere."

His relict, with a glance at his portrait, shook her head and wiped her eyes.

"I revere the memory of Mr. F as an estimable man and most indulgent husband, only necessary to mention Asparagus and it appeared or to hint at any little delicate thing to drink and it came like magic in a pint bottle it was not ecstasy but it was comfort, I returned to papa's roof and lived secluded if not happy during some years until one day papa came smoothly blundering in and said that Arthur Clennam awaited me below, I went below and found him ask me not what I found him except that he was still unmarried still unchanged!"

The dark mystery with which Flora now enshrouded herself might have stopped other fingers than the nimble fingers that worked near her. They worked on, without pause, and the busy head bent over them watching the stitches.

"Ask me not," said Flora, "if I love him still or if he still loves me or what the end is to be or when, we are surrounded by watchful eyes and it may be that we are destined to pine asunder it may be never more to be reunited not a word not a breath not a look to betray us all must be secret as the tomb wonder not therefore that

even if I should seem comparatively cold to Arthur or Arthur should seem comparatively cold to me we have fatal reasons it is enough if we understand them hush!"

All of which Flora said with so much headlong vehemence as if she really believed it. There is not much doubt, that, when she worked herself into full mermaid condition, she did actually believe whatever she said in it.

"Hush!" repeated Flora, "I have now told you all, confidence is established between us hush, for Arthur's sake I will always be a friend to you my dear girl and in Arthur's name you may always rely upon me."

The nimble fingers laid aside the work, and the little figure rose and kissed her hand. "You are very cold," said Flora, changing to her own natural kind-hearted manner, and gaining greatly by the change. "Don't work to-day I am sure you are not well I am sure you are not strong."

"It is only that I feel a little overcome by your kindness, and by Mr. Clennam's kindness in confiding me to one he has known and loved so long."

"Well really my dear," said Flora, who had a decided tendency to be always honest when she gave herself time to think about it, "It's as well to leave that alone now, for I couldn't undertake to say after all, but it doesn't signify lie down a little!"

"I have always been strong enough to do what I want to do, and I shall be quite well directly," returned Little Dorrit, with a faint smile. "You have overpowered me with gratitude, that's all. If I keep near the window for a moment, I shall be quite myself."

Flora opened a window, sat her in a chair by it, and considerably retired to her former place. It was a

windy day, and the air stirring on Little Dorrit's face soon brightened it. In a very few minutes she returned to her basket of work, and her nimble fingers were as nimble as ever.

Quietly pursuing her task, she asked Flora if Mr. Clennam had told her where she lived? When Flora replied in the negative, Little Dorrit said that she understood why he had been so delicate, but that she felt sure he would approve of her confiding her secret to Flora, and that she would therefore do so now with Flora's permission. Receiving an encouraging answer, she condensed the narrative of her life into a few scanty words about herself, and a glowing eulogy upon her father; and Flora took it all in with a natural tenderness that quite understood it, and in which there was no incoherence.

When dinner-time came, Flora drew the arm of her new charge through hers, and led her down-stairs, and presented her to the Patriarch and Mr. Pancks, who were already in the dining-room waiting to begin. (Mr. F's Aunt was, for the time, laid up in ordinary in her chamber.) By those gentlemen she was received according to their characters; the Patriarch appearing to do her some inestimable service in saying that he was glad to see her, glad to see her; and Mr. Pancks blowing off his favorite sound as a salute.

In that new presence she would have been bashful enough under any circumstances, and particularly under Flora's insisting on her drinking a glass of wine and eating of the best that was there; but her constraint was greatly increased by Mr. Pancks. The demeanor of that gentleman at first suggested to her mind that he might be a taker of likenesses, so intently did he look at her, and so frequently did he glance at the little note-book by

his side. Observing that he made no sketch, however, and that he talked about business only, she began to have suspicions that he represented some creditor of her father's, the balance due to whom was noted in that pocket volume. Regarded from this point of view Mr. Pancks's puffings expressed injury and impatience, and each of his louder snorts became a demand for payment.

But, here again she was undeceived by anomalous and incongruous conduct on the part of Mr. Pancks himself. She had left the table half an hour, and was at work alone. Flora had "gone to lie down" in the next room, concurrently with which retirement a smell of something to drink had broken out in the house. The Patriarch was fast asleep, with his philanthropic mouth open, under a yellow pocket-handkerchief in the dining-room. At this quiet time, Mr. Pancks softly appeared before her, urbanely nodding.

"Find it a little dull, Miss Dorrit?" inquired Pancks, in a low voice.

"No, thank you, sir," said Little Dorrit.

"Busy, I see," observed Mr. Pancks, stealing into the room by inches. "What are those now, Miss Dorrit?"

"Handkerchiefs."

"Are they, though!" said Pancks. "I shouldn't have thought it." Not in the least looking at them, but looking at Little Dorrit. "Perhaps you wonder who I am. Shall I tell you? I am a fortune-teller."

Little Dorrit now began to think he was mad.

"I belong body and soul to my proprietor," said Pancks; "you saw my proprietor having his dinner below. But I do a little in the other way, sometimes; privately, very privately, Miss Dorrit."

Little Dorrit looked at him doubtfully, and not with-

out alarm. "I wish you'd show me the palm of your hand," said Pancks. "I should like to have a look at it. Don't let me be troublesome."

He was so far troublesome that he was not at all wanted there, but she laid her work in her lap for a moment, and held out her left hand with the thimble on it.

"Years of toil, eh?" said Pancks, softly, touching it with his blunt forefinger. "But what else are we made for? Nothing. Hallo!" looking into the lines. "What's this with bars? It's a College! And what's this with a gray gown and a black velvet cap? It's a father! And what's this with a clarionet? It's an uncle! And what's this in dancing-shoes? It's a sister! And what's this straggling about in an idle sort of a way? It's a brother! And what's this thinking for 'em all? Why, this is you, Miss Dorrit!"

Her eyes met his as she looked up wonderingly into his face, and she thought that although his were sharp eyes, he was a brighter and gentler-looking man than she had supposed at dinner. His eyes were on her hand again directly, and her opportunity of confirming or correcting the impression was gone.

"Now, the deuce is in it," muttered Pancks, tracing out a line in her hand with his clumsy finger, "if this isn't me in the corner here! What do I want here? What's behind me?"

He carried his finger slowly down to the wrist, and round the wrist, and affected to look at the back of the hand for what was behind him.

"Is it any harm?" asked Little Dorrit, smiling.

"Deuce a bit!" said Pancks. "What do you think it's worth?"

"I ought to ask you that. I am not the fortune-teller."

"True," said Pancks. "What's it worth? You shall live to see, Miss Dorrit."

Releasing the hand by slow degrees, he drew all his fingers through his prongs of hair, so that they stood up in their most portentous manner; and repeated slowly, "Remember what I say, Miss Dorrit. You shall live to see."

She could not help showing that she was much surprised, if it were only by his knowing so much about her.

"Ah! That's it!" said Pancks, pointing at her. "Miss Dorrit, not that, ever!"

More surprised than before, and a little more frightened, she looked to him for an explanation of his last words.

"Not that," said Pancks, making, with great seriousness, an imitation of a surprised look and manner, that appeared to be unintentionally grotesque. "Don't do that. Never on seeing me, no matter when, no matter where. I am nobody. Don't take on to mind me. Don't mention me. Take no notice. Will you agree, Miss Dorrit?"

"I hardly know what to say," returned Little Dorrit, quite astounded. "Why?"

"Because I am a fortune-teller. Pancks the gypsy. I haven't told you so much of your fortune, yet, Miss Dorrit, as to tell you what's behind me on that little hand. I have told you you shall live to see. Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?"

"Agreed that I — am — to" —

"To take no notice of me away from here, unless I

take on first. Not to mind me when I come and go. It's very easy. I am no loss, I am not handsome, I am not good company, I am only my proprietor's grubber. You need do no more than think, 'Ah! Pancks the gypsy at his fortune-telling — he'll tell the rest of my fortune one day — I shall live to know it.' Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?"

"Ye-ea," faltered Little Dorrit, whom he greatly confused, "I suppose so, while you do no harm."

"Good!" Mr. Pancks glanced at the wall of the adjoining room, and stooped forward. "Honest creature, woman of capital points, but heedless and a loose talker, Miss Dorrit." With that he rubbed his hands as if the interview had been very satisfactory to him, panted away to the door, and urbanely nodded himself out again.

If Little Dorrit were beyond measure perplexed by this curious conduct on the part of her new acquaintance, and by finding herself involved in this singular treaty, her perplexity was not diminished by ensuing circumstances. Besides that Mr. Pancks took every opportunity afforded him in Mr. Casby's house of significantly glancing at her and snorting at her — which was not much, after what he had done already — he began to pervade her daily life. She saw him in the street, constantly. When she went to Mr. Casby's, he was always there. When she went to Mrs. Clennam's, he came there on any pretence, as if to keep her in his sight. A week had not gone by, when she found him to her astonishment, in the Lodge one night, conversing with the turnkey on duty, and to all appearance one of his familiar companions. Her next surprise was to find him equally at his ease within the prison; to hear of his presenting himself

among the visitors at her father's Sunday levee ; to see him arm in arm with a Collegiate friend about the yard ; to learn, from Fame, that he had greatly distinguished himself one evening at the social club that held its meetings in the Snuggery, by addressing a speech to the members of that institution, singing a song, and treating the company to five gallons of ale — report madly added a bushel of shrimps. The effect on Mr. Plornish of such of these phenomena as he became an eye-witness of, in his faithful visits, made an impression on Little Dorrit only second to that produced by the phenomena themselves. They seemed to gag and bind him. He could only stare, and sometimes weakly mutter that it wouldn't be believed down Bleeding Heart Yard that this was Pancks ; but he never said a word more, or made a sign more, even to Little Dorrit. Mr. Pancks crowned his mysteries by making himself acquainted with Tip in some unknown manner, and taking a Sunday saunter into the College on that gentleman's arm. Throughout he never took any notice of Little Dorrit, save once or twice when he happened to come close to her, and there was no one very near ; on which occasions, he said in passing, with a friendly look and a puff of encouragement, " Pancks the gypsy — fortune-telling."

Little Dorrit worked and strove as usual, wondering at all this, but keeping her wonder, as she had from her earliest years kept many heavier loads, in her own breast. A change had stolen, and was stealing yet, over the patient heart. Every day found her something more retiring than the day before. To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were, for herself, her chief desires.

To her own room too, strangely assorted room for her

delicate youth and character, she was glad to retreat as often as she could without desertion of any duty. There were afternoon times when she was unemployed, when visitors dropped in to play a hand at cards with her father, when she could be spared and was better away. Then she would flit along the yard, climb the scores of stairs that led to her room, and take her seat at the window. Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears; but beautiful or hardened still, always over it and under it and through it, she was fain to look in her solitude, seeing everything with that ineffaceable brand.

A garret, and a Marshalsea garret without compromise, was Little Dorrit's room. Beautifully kept, it was ugly in itself, and had little but cleanliness and air to set it off; for what embellishment she had ever been able to buy, had gone to her father's room. Howbeit, for this poor place she showed an increasing love; and to sit in it alone became her favorite rest.

Insomuch, that on a certain afternoon, during the Pancks mysteries, when she was seated at her window, and heard Maggy's well-known step coming up the stairs, she was very much disturbed by the apprehension of being summoned away. As Maggy's step came higher up and nearer, she trembled and faltered; and it was as much as she could do to speak, when Maggy at length appeared.

"Please, Little Mother," said Maggy, panting for breath, "you must come down and see him. He's here."

"Who, Maggy?"

"Who, o' course Mr. Clennam. He's in your father's room, and he says to me, Maggy, will you be so kind and go and say it's only me."

"I am not very well, Maggy. I had better not go. I am going to lie down. See! I lie down now, to ease my head. Say, with my grateful regard, that you left me so, or I would have come."

"Well, it a'n't very polite though, Little Mother," said the staring Maggy, "to turn your face away, neither!"

Maggy was very susceptible to personal slights, and very ingenious in inventing them. "Putting both your hands afore your face too!" she went on. "If you can't bear the looks of a poor thing, it would be better to tell her so at once, and not go and shut her out like that, hurting her feelings and breaking her heart at ten year old, poor thing!"

"It's to ease my head, Maggy."

"Well, and if you cry to ease your head, Little Mother, let me cry too. Don't go and have all the crying to yourself," expostulated Maggy, "that a'n't not being greedy." And immediately began to blubber.

It was with some difficulty that she could be induced to go back with the excuse; but the promise of being told a story — of old her great delight — on condition that she concentrated her faculties upon the errand and left her little mistress to herself for an hour longer, combined with a misgiving on Maggy's part that she had left her good temper at the bottom of the staircase, prevailed. So away she went, muttering her message all the way to keep it in her mind, and, at the appointed time, came back.

"He was very sorry, I can tell you," she announced,

"and wanted to send a doctor. And he's coming again to-morrow he is, and I don't think he'll have a good sleep to-night along o' hearing about your head, Little Mother. Oh my! A'n't you been a-crying!"

"I think I have, a little, Maggy."

"A little! Oh!"

"But it's all over now — all over for good, Maggy. And my head is much better and cooler, and I am quite comfortable. I am very glad I did not go down."

Her great staring child tenderly embraced her; and having smoothed her hair, and bathed her forehead and eyes with cold water (offices in which her awkward hands became skilful), hugged her again, exulted in her brighter looks, and stationed her in her chair by the window. Over against this chair, Maggy, with apoplectic exertions that were not at all required, dragged the box which was her seat on story-telling occasions, sat down upon it, hugged her own knees, and said, with a voracious appetite for stories, and with widely-opened eyes:

"Now, Little Mother, let's have a good 'un!"

"What shall it be about, Maggy?"

"Oh, let's have a Princess," said Maggy, "and let her be a reg'lar one. Beyond all belief, you know!"

Little Dorrit considered for a moment; and with a rather sad smile upon her face, which was flushed by the sunset, began:

"Maggy, there was once upon a time a fine King, and he had everything he could wish for, and a great deal more. He had gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, riches of every kind. He had palaces, and he had —"

"Hospitals," interposed Maggy, still nursing her knees. "Let him have hospitals, because they're so comfortable. Hospitals with lots of Chicking."

"Yes, he had plenty of them, and he had plenty of everything."

"Plenty of baked potatoes, for instance?" said Maggy.

"Plenty of everything."

"Lor!" chuckled Maggy, giving her knees a hug. "Wasn't it prime!"

"This King had a daughter, who was the wisest and most beautiful Princess that ever was seen. When she was a child she understood all her lessons before her masters taught them to her; and when she was grown up, she was the wonder of the world. Now, near the Palace where this Princess lived, there was a cottage in which there was a poor little tiny woman, who lived all alone by herself."

"A old woman," said Maggy, with an unctuous smack of her lips.

"No, not an old woman. Quite a young one."

"I wonder she warn't afraid," said Maggy. "Go on, please."

"The Princess passed the cottage nearly every day, and whenever she went by in her beautiful carriage, she saw the poor tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. So, one day she stopped the coachman a little way from the cottage, and got out and walked on and peeped in at the door, and there, as usual, was the tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the Princess, and the Princess looked at her."

"Like trying to stare one another out," said Maggy. "Please go on, Little Mother."

"The Princess was such a wonderful Princess that she had the power of knowing secrets, and she said to the tiny woman, Why do you keep it there? This showed

her directly that the Princess knew why she lived all alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she kneeled down at the Princess's feet, and asked her never to betray her. So, the Princess said, I never will betray you. Let me see it. So, the tiny woman closed the shutter of the cottage window and fastened the door, and, trembling from head to foot for fear that any one should suspect her, opened a very secret place, and showed the Princess a shadow."

"Lor!" said Maggy.

"It was the shadow of Some one who had gone by long before: of Some one who had gone on far away quite out of reach, never, never to come back. It was bright to look at; and when the tiny woman showed it to the Princess, she was proud of it with all her heart, as a great, great, treasure. When the Princess had considered it a little while, she said to the tiny woman, And you keep watch over this, every day? And she cast down her eyes, and whispered, Yes. Then the Princess said, Remind me why. To which the other replied, that no one so good and kind had ever passed that way, and that was why in the beginning. She said, too, that nobody missed it, that nobody was the worse for it, that Some one had gone on to those who were expecting him —"

"Some one was a man then?" interposed Maggy.

Little Dorrit timidly said yes, she believed so; and resumed:

"— Had gone on to those who were expecting him, and that this remembrance was stolen or kept back from nobody. The Princess made answer, Ah! But when the cottager died it would be discovered there. The tiny woman told her No; when that time came, it would

sink quietly into her own grave, and would never be found."

"Well, to be sure!" said Maggy. "Go on, please."

"The Princess was very much astonished to hear this, as you may suppose, Maggy."

("And well she might be," said Maggy.)

"So she resolved to watch the tiny woman, and see what came of it. Every day, she drove in her beautiful carriage by the cottage door, and there she saw the tiny woman always alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. At last one day the wheel was still, and the tiny woman was not to be seen. When the Princess made inquiries why the wheel had stopped, and where the tiny woman was, she was informed that the wheel had stopped because there was nobody to turn it, the tiny woman being dead."

("They ought to have took her to the Hospital," said Maggy, "and then she'd have got over it.")

"The Princess, after crying a very little for the loss of the tiny woman, dried her eyes and got out of her carriage at the place where she had stopped it before, and went to the cottage and peeped in at the door. There was nobody to look at her now, and nobody for her to look at, so she went in at once to search for the treasured shadow. But there was no sign of it to be found anywhere; and then she knew that the tiny woman had told her the truth, and that it would never give anybody any trouble, and that it had sunk quietly into her own grave, and that she and it were at rest together.

"That's all, Maggy."

The sunset flush was so bright on Little Dorrit's face

when she came thus to the end of her story, that she interposed her hand to shade it.

"Had she got to be old?" Maggy asked.

"The tiny woman?"

"Ah!"

"I don't know," said Little Dorrit. "But it would have been just the same, if she had been ever and ever so old."

"Would it raly!" said Maggy. "Well I suppose it would though." And sat staring and ruminating.

She sat so long with her eyes wide open, that at length Little Dorrit, to entice her from her box, rose and looked out of window. As she glanced down into the yard, she saw Pancks come in, and leer up with the corner of his eye as he went by.

"Who's he, Little Mother?" said Maggy. She had joined her at the window and was leaning on her shoulder. "I see him come in and out often."

"I have heard him called a fortune-teller," said Little Dorrit. "But I doubt if he could tell many people, even their past or present fortunes."

"Couldn't have told the Princess hers?" said Maggy.

Little Dorrit, looking musingly down into the dark valley of the prison, shook her head.

"Nor the tiny woman hers?" said Maggy.

"No," said Little Dorrit, with the sunset very bright upon her. "But let us come away from the window."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONSPIRATORS AND OTHERS.

THE private residence of Mr. Pancks was in Pentonville, where he lodged on the second floor of a professional gentleman in an extremely small way, who had an inner door within the street door, poised on a spring and starting open with a click like a trap ; and who wrote up in the fan-light, RUGG, GENERAL AGENT, ACCOUNTANT, DEBTS RECOVERED.

This scroll, majestic in its severe simplicity, illuminated a little slip of front garden abutting on the thirsty high road, where a few of the dustiest of leaves hung their dismal heads and led a life of choking. A professor of writing occupied the first floor, and enlivened the garden railings with glass cases containing choice examples of what his pupils had been before six lessons and while the whole of his young family shook the table, and what they had become after six lessons when the young family was under restraint. The tenancy of Mr. Pancks was limited to one airy bedroom ; he covenanting and agreeing with Mr. Rugg his landlord, that in consideration of a certain scale of payments accurately defined, and on certain verbal notice duly given, he should be at liberty to elect to share the Sunday breakfast, dinner, tea, or supper, or each or any or all of those repasts or meals, of Mr. and Miss Rugg (his daughter) in the back parlor.

Miss Rugg was a lady of a little property, which she had acquired, together with much distinction in the neighborhood, by having her heart severely lacerated and her feelings mangled by a middle-aged baker, resident in the vicinity, against whom she had, by the agency of Mr. Rugg, found it necessary to proceed at law to recover damages for a breach of promise of marriage. The baker, having been, by the counsel for Miss Rugg, witheringly denounced on that occasion up to the full amount of twenty guineas, at the rate of about eighteen-pence an epithet, and having been cast in corresponding damages, still suffered occasional persecution from the youth of Pentonville. But Miss Rugg, environed by the majesty of the law, and having her damages invested in the public securities, was regarded with consideration.

In the society of Mr. Rugg, who had a round white visage, as if all his blushes had been drawn out of him long ago, and who had a ragged yellow head like a worn-out hearth-broom; and in the society of Miss Rugg, who had little nankeen spots, like shirt buttons, all over her face, and whose own yellow tresses were rather scrubby than luxuriant; Mr. Pancks had usually dined on Sundays for some few years, and had twice a week, or so, enjoyed an evening collation of bread, Dutch cheese, and porter. Mr. Pancks was one of the very few marriageable men for whom Miss Rugg had no terrors, the argument with which he reassured himself being twofold; that is to say, firstly, "that it wouldn't do twice," and secondly "that he wasn't worth it." Fortified with this double armor, Mr. Pancks snorted at Miss Rugg on easy terms.

Up to this time, Mr. Pancks had transacted little or no

business at his quarters in Pentonville, except in the sleeping line; but, now that he had become a fortune-teller, he was often closeted after midnight with Mr. Rugg in his little front-parlor office, and, even after those untimely hours, burnt tallow in his bedroom. Though his duties as his proprietor's grubber were in no wise lessened; and though that service bore no greater resemblance to a bed of roses than was to be discovered in its many thorns; some new branch of industry made a constant demand upon him. When he cast off the Patriarch at night, it was only to take an anonymous craft in tow, and labor away afresh in other waters.

The advance from a personal acquaintance with the elder Mr. Chivery, to an introduction to his amiable wife and disconsolate son, may have been easy; but easy or not, Mr. Pancks soon made it. He nestled in the bosom of the tobacco business within a week or two after his first appearance in the College, and particularly addressed himself to the cultivation of a good understanding with Young John. In this endeavor he so prospered as to lure that pining shepherd forth from the groves, and tempt him to undertake mysterious missions; on which he began to disappear at uncertain intervals for as long a space as two or three days together. The prudent Mrs. Chivery, who wondered greatly at this change, would have protested against it as detrimental to the Highland typification on the door-post, but for two forcible reasons; one, that her John was roused to take strong interest in the business which these starts were supposed to advance — and this she held to be good for his drooping spirits; the other, that Mr. Pancks confidentially agreed to pay her, for the occupation of her son's time, at the handsome rate of seven and sixpence per day. The proposal originated with

himself, and was couched in the pithy terms, "If your John is weak enough, ma'am, not to take it, that is no reason why you should be, don't you see? So, quite between ourselves, ma'am, business being business, here it is!"

What Mr. Chivery thought of these things, or how much or how little he knew about them, was never gathered from himself. It has been already remarked that he was a man of few words; and it may be here observed, that he had imbibed a professional habit of locking everything up. He locked himself up as carefully as he locked up the Marshalsea debtors. Even his custom of bolting his meals may have been a part of an uniform whole; but there is no question, that, as to all other purposes, he kept his mouth as he kept the Marshalsea door. He never opened it without occasion. When it was necessary to let anything out, he opened it a little way, held it open just as long as sufficed for the purpose, and locked it again. Even as he would be sparing of his trouble at the Marshalsea door, and would keep a visitor who wanted to go out, waiting for a few moments if he saw another visitor coming down the yard, so that one turn of the key should suffice for both, similarly he would often reserve a remark if he perceived another on its way to his lips, and would deliver himself of the two together. As to any key to his inner knowledge being to be found in his face, the Marshalsea key was as legible an index to the individual characters and histories upon which it was turned.

That Mr. Pancks should be moved to invite any one to dinner at Pentonville, was an unprecedented fact in his calendar. But he invited Young John to dinner, and even brought him within range of the dangerous

(because expensive) fascinations of Miss Rugg. The banquet was appointed for a Sunday, and Miss Rugg with her own hands stuffed a leg of mutton with oysters on the occasion, and sent it to the baker's — not *the* baker's, but an opposition establishment. Provision of oranges, apples, and nuts was also made. And rum was brought home by Mr. Pancks on Saturday night, to gladden the visitor's heart.

The store of creature comforts was not the chief part of the visitor's reception. Its special feature was a foregone family confidence and sympathy. When Young John appeared at half-past one, without the ivory hand and waistcoat of golden sprigs, the sun shorn of his beams by disastrous clouds, Mr. Pancks presented him to the yellow-haired Ruggs as the young man he had so often mentioned who loved Miss Dorrit.

"I am glad," said Mr. Rugg, challenging him specially in that character, "to have the distinguished gratification of making your acquaintance, sir. Your feelings do you honor. You are young; may you never outlive your feelings! If I was to outlive my own feelings, sir," said Mr. Rugg, who was a man of many words, and was considered to possess a remarkably good address; "if I was to outlive my own feelings, I'd leave fifty pound in my will to the man who would put me out of existence."

Miss Rugg heaved a sigh.

"My daughter, sir," said Mr. Rugg. "Anastatia, you are no stranger to the state of this young man's affections. My daughter has had her trials, sir," Mr. Rugg might have used the word more pointedly in the singular number, "and she can feel for you."

Young John, almost overwhelmed by the touching nature of this greeting, professed himself to that effect.

"What I envy you, sir, is," said Mr. Rugg, "allow me to take your hat — we are rather short of pegs — I'll put it in the corner, nobody will tread in in there — What I envy you, sir, is the luxury of your own feelings. I belong to a profession in which that luxury is sometimes denied us."

Young John replied, with acknowledgments, that he only hoped he did what was right, and what showed how entirely he was devoted to Miss Dorrit. He wished to be unselfish; and he hoped he was. He wished to do anything as laid in his power to serve Miss Dorrit, altogether putting himself out of sight; and he hoped he did. It was but little that he could do, but he hoped he did it.

"Sir," said Mr. Rugg, taking him by the hand, "you are a young man that it does one good to come across. You are a young man that I should like to put in the witness-box, to humanize the minds of the legal profession. I hope you have brought your appetite with you, and intend to play a good knife and fork?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Young John, "I don't eat much at present."

Mr. Rugg drew him a little apart. "My daughter's case, sir," said he, "at the time when, in vindication of her outraged feelings and her sex, she became the plaintiff in Rugg and Hawkins. I suppose I could have put it in evidence, Mr. Chivery, if I had thought it worth my while, that the amount of solid sustenance my daughter consumed at that period did not exceed ten ounces per week."

"I think I go a little beyond that, sir," returned the other, hesitating, as if he confessed it with some shame.

"But in your case there's no fiend in human form,"

said Mr. Rugg, with argumentative smile and action of hand. "Observe, Mr. Chivery! No fiend in human form!"

"No, sir, certainly," Young John added with simplicity, "I should be very sorry if there was."

"The sentiment," said Mr. Rugg, "is what I should have expected from your known principles. It would affect my daughter greatly, sir, if she heard it. As I perceive the mutton, I am glad she didn't hear it. Mr. Pancks, on this occasion, pray face me. My dear, face Mr. Chivery. For what we are going to receive, may we (and Miss Dorrit) be truly thankful!"

But for a grave waggishness in Mr. Rugg's manner of delivering this introduction to the feast, it might have appeared that Miss Dorrit was expected to be one of the company. Pancks recognized the sally in his usual way, and took in his provender in his usual way. Miss Rugg, perhaps making up some of her arrears, likewise took very kindly to the mutton, and it rapidly diminished to the bone. A bread-and-butter pudding entirely disappeared, and a considerable amount of cheese and radishes vanished by the same means. Then came the dessert.

Then also, and before the broaching of the rum and water, came Mr. Pancks's note-book. The ensuing business proceedings were brief but curious, and rather in the nature of a conspiracy. Mr. Pancks looked over his note-book which was now getting full, studiously; and picked out little extracts, which he wrote on separate slips of paper on the table; Mr. Rugg, in the meanwhile, looking at him with close attention, and Young John losing his uncollected eye in mists of meditation. When Mr. Pancks, who supported the character of chief conspirator, had completed his extracts, he looked them over,

corrected them, put up his note-book, and held them like a hand at cards.

"Now, there's a churchyard in Bedfordshire," said Pancks. "Who takes it?"

"I'll take it, sir," returned Mr. Rugg, "if no one bids."

Mr. Pancks dealt him his card, and looked at his hand again.

"Now, there's an Enquiry in York," said Pancks. "Who takes it?"

"I'm not good for York," said Mr. Rugg.

"Then perhaps," pursued Pancks, "you'll be so obliging, John Chivery?"

Young John assenting, Pancks dealt him his card, and consulted his hand again.

"There's a Church in London; I may as well take that. And a Family Bible; I may as well take that, too. That's two to me. Two to me," repeated Pancks, breathing hard over his cards. "Here's a Clerk at Durham for you, John, and an old seafaring gentleman at Dunstable for you, Mr. Rugg. Two to me, was it? Yes, two to me. Here's a Stone; three to me. And a Still-born Baby; four to me. And all, for the present, told."

When he had thus disposed of his cards, all being done very quietly and in a suppressed tone, Mr. Pancks puffed his way into his own breast-pocket and tugged out a canvas bag: from which, with a sparing hand, he told forth money for travelling expenses in two little portions. "Cash goes out fast," he said anxiously, as he pushed a portion to each of his male companions, "very fast."

"I can only assure you, Mr. Pancks," said Young John,

"that I deeply regret my circumstances being such that I can't afford to pay my own charges, or that it's not advisable to allow me the time necessary for my doing the distances on foot. Because nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to walk myself off my legs without fee or reward."

This young man's disinterestedness appeared so very ludicrous in the eyes of Miss Rugg, that she was obliged to effect a precipitate retirement from the company, and to sit upon the stairs until she had had her laugh out. Meanwhile Mr. Pancks, looking, not without some pity, at Young John, slowly and thoughtfully twisted up his canvas bag as if he were wringing its neck. The lady returning as he restored it to his pocket, mixed rum and water for the party, not forgetting her fair self, and handed to every one his glass. When all were supplied, Mr. Rugg rose, and silently holding out his glass at arm's length above the centre of the table, by that gesture invited the other three to add theirs, and to unite in a general conspiratorial clink. The ceremony was effective up to a certain point, and would have been wholly so throughout, if Miss Rugg, as she raised her glass to her lips in completion of it, had not happened to look at Young John; when she was again so overcome by the contemptible comicality of his disinterestedness, as to splutter some ambrosial drops of rum and water around, and withdraw in confusion.

Such was the dinner without precedent, given by Pancks at Pentonville; and such was the busy and strange life Pancks led. The only waking moments at which he appeared to relax from his cares, and to recreate himself by going anywhere or saying anything without a pervading object, were when he showed a dawning inter-

est in the lame foreigner with the stick, down Bleeding Heart Yard.

The foreigner, by name John Baptist Cavalletto — they called him Mr. Baptist in the Yard — was such a chirping, easy, hopeful little fellow, that his attraction for Pancks was probably in the force of contrast. Solitary, weak, and scantily acquainted with the most necessary words of the only language in which he could communicate with the people about him, he went with the stream of his fortunes, in a brisk way that was new in those parts. With little to eat, and less to drink, and nothing to wear but what he wore upon him, or had brought tied up in one of the smallest bundles that ever were seen, he put as bright a face upon it as if he were in the most flourishing circumstances, when he first hobbled up and down the Yard, humbly propitiating the general good-will with his white teeth.

It was up-hill work for a foreigner, lame or sound, to make his way with the Bleeding Hearts. In the first place, they were vaguely persuaded that every foreigner had a knife about him ; in the second, they held it to be a sound constitutional national axiom that he ought to go home to his own country. They never thought of inquiring how many of their own countrymen would be returned upon their hands from divers parts of the world, if the principle were generally recognized ; they considered it practically and peculiarly British. In the third place, they had a notion that it was a sort of Divine visitation upon a foreigner that he was not an Englishman, and that all kinds of calamities happened to his country because it did things that England did not, and did not do things that England did. In this belief, to be sure, they had long been carefully trained by the Barnacles and

Stiltstalkings, who were always proclaiming to them, officially and unofficially, that no country which failed to submit itself to those two large families could possibly hope to be under the protection of Providence; and who, when they believed it, disparaged them in private as the most prejudiced people under the sun.

This, therefore, might be called a political position of the Bleeding Hearts; but they entertained other objections to having foreigners in the Yard. They believed that foreigners were always badly off; and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. They believed that foreigners were dragooned and bayoneted; and though they certainly got their own skulls promptly fractured if they showed any ill humor, still it was with a blunt instrument, and that didn't count. They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it. They believed that foreigners had no independent spirit, as never being escorted to the poll in droves by Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, with colors flying and the tune of Rule Britannia playing. Not to be tedious, they had many other beliefs of a similar kind.

Against these obstacles, the lame foreigner with the stick had to make head as well as he could; not absolutely single-handed, because Mr. Arthur Clennam had recommended him to the Plornishes (he lived at the top of the same house), but still at heavy odds. However, the Bleeding Hearts were kind hearts; and when they saw the little fellow cheerily limping about with a good-humored face, doing no harm, drawing no knives, committing no outrageous immoralities, living chiefly on fari-

naceous and milk diet, and playing with Mrs. Plornish's children of an evening, they began to think that although he could never hope to be an Englishman, still it would be hard to visit that affliction on his head. They began to accommodate themselves to his level, calling him "Mr. Baptist," but treating him like a baby, and laughing immoderately at his lively gestures and his childish English — more, because he didn't mind it, and laughed too. They spoke to him in very loud voices as if he were stone deaf. They constructed sentences, by way of teaching him the language in its purity, such as were addressed by the savages to Captain Cook, or by Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Mrs. Plornish was particularly ingenious in this art; and attained so much celebrity for saying "Me ope you leg well soon," that it was considered in the Yard but a very short remove indeed from speaking Italian. Even Mrs. Plornish herself began to think that she had a natural call towards that language. As he became more popular, household objects were brought into requisition for his instruction in a copious vocabulary; and whenever he appeared in the Yard, ladies would fly out at their doors crying, "Mr. Baptist — teapot!" "Mr. Baptist — dust-pan!" "Mr. Baptist — flour-dredger!" "Mr. Baptist — coffee-biggin!" At the same time exhibiting those articles, and penetrating him with a sense of the appalling difficulties of the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

It was in this stage of his progress, and in about the third week of his occupation, that Mr. Pancks's fancy became attracted by the little man. Mounting to his attic, attended by Mrs. Plornish as interpreter, he found Mr. Baptist with no furniture but his bed on the ground, a table, and a chair, carving with the aid of a few simple tools in the blithest way possible.

"Now, old chap," said Mr. Pancks, "pay up!"

He had his money ready, folded in a scrap of paper, and laughingly handed it in; then with a free action, threw out as many fingers of his right hand as there were shillings, and made a cut crosswise in the air for an odd sixpence.

"Oh!" said Mr. Pancks, watching him, wonderingly. "That's it, is it? You're a quick customer. It's all right. I didn't expect to receive it, though."

Mrs. Plornish here interposed with great condescension, and explained to Mr. Baptist. "E please. E glad get money."

The little man smiled and nodded. His bright face seemed uncommonly attractive to Mr. Pancks. "How's he getting on in his limb?" he asked Mrs. Plornish.

"Oh, he's a deal better, sir," said Mrs. Plornish. "We expect next week he'll be able to leave off his stick entirely." (The opportunity being too favorable to be lost, Mrs. Plornish displayed her great accomplishment, by explaining, with pardonable pride, to Mr. Baptist, "E ope you leg well soon.")

"He's a merry fellow, too," said Mr. Pancks, admiring him as if he were a mechanical toy. "How does he live?"

"Why, sir," rejoined Mrs. Plornish, "he turns out to have quite a power of carving them flowers that you see him at now." (Mr. Baptist, watching their faces as they spoke, held up his work. Mrs. Plornish interpreted in her Italian manner, on behalf of Mr. Pancks, "E please. Double good!")

"Can he live by that?" asked Mr. Pancks.

"He can live on very little, sir, and it is expected as he will be able, in time, to make a very good living.

Mr. Clennam got it him to do, and gives him odd jobs besides, in at the Works next door — makes 'em for him, in short, when he knows he wants 'em."

"And what does he do with himself, now, when he a'n't hard at it?" said Mr. Pancks.

"Why, not much as yet, sir, on accounts I suppose of not being able to walk much; but he goes about the Yard, and he chats without particular understanding or being understood, and he plays with the children, and he sits in the sun — he'll sit down anywhere, as if it was a arm-chair — and he'll sing, and he'll laugh!"

"Laugh!" echoed Mr. Pancks. "He looks to me as if every tooth in his head was always laughing."

"But whenever he gets to the top of the steps at t'other end of the Yard," said Mrs. Plornish, "he'll peep out in the curiosest way! So that some of us thinks he's peeping out towards where his own country is, and some of us thinks he's looking for somebody he don't want to see, and some of us don't know what to think."

Mr. Baptist seemed to have a general understanding of what she said; or perhaps his quickness caught and applied her slight action of peeping. In any case, he closed his eyes and tossed his head with the air of a man who had his sufficient reasons for what he did, and said in his own tongue, it didn't matter. Altro!

"What's Altro?" said Pancks.

"Hem! It's a sort of a general kind of expression, sir," said Mrs. Plornish.

"Is it?" said Pancks. "Why, then Altro to you, old chap. Good afternoon. Altro!"

Mr. Baptist in his vivacious way repeating the word several times, Mr. Pancks in his duller way gave it him back once. From that time it became a frequent custom

with Pancks the gypey, as he went home jaded at night, to pass round by Bleeding Heart Yard, go quietly up the stairs, look in at Mr. Baptist's door, and, finding him in his room, to say, "Hallo, old chap! Altro!" To which Mr. Baptist would reply, with innumerable bright nods and smiles, "Altro, signore, altro, altro, altro!" After this highly condensed conversation, Mr. Pancks would go his way; with an appearance of being lightened and refreshed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOBODY'S STATE OF MIND.

IF Arthur Clennam had not arrived at that wise decision firmly to restrain himself from loving Pet, he would have lived on in a state of much perplexity, involving difficult struggles with his own heart. Not the least of these would have been a contention, always waging within it, between a tendency to dislike Mr. Henry Gowan, if not to regard him with positive repugnance, and a whisper that the inclination was unworthy. A generous nature is not prone to strong aversions, and is slow to admit them even dispassionately; but when it finds ill-will gaining upon it, and can discern between-whiles that its origin is not dispassionate, such a nature becomes distressed.

Therefore Mr. Henry Gowan would have clouded Clennam's mind, and would have been far oftener present to it than more agreeable persons and subjects, but for the great prudence of his decision aforesaid. As it was, Mr. Gowan seemed transferred to Daniel Doyce's mind; at all events, it so happened that it usually fell to Mr. Doyce's turn, rather than to Clennam's, to speak of him in the friendly conversations they held together. These were of frequent occurrence now; as the two partners shared a portion of a roomy house in one of the grave, old-fashioned City streets, lying not far from the Bank of England, by London Wall.

Mr. Doyce had been to Twickenham to pass the day. Clennam had excused himself. Mr. Doyce was just come home. He put in his head at the door of Clennam's sitting-room to say Good night.

"Come in, come in!" said Clennam.

"I saw you were reading," returned Doyce, as he entered, "and thought you might not care to be disturbed."

But for the notable resolution he had made, Clennam really might not have known what he had been reading; really might not have had his eyes upon the book for an hour past, though it lay open before him. He shut it up, rather quickly.

"Are they well?" he asked.

"Yes," said Doyce; "they are well. They are all well."

Daniel had an old workmanlike habit of carrying his pocket-handkerchief in his hat. He took it out and wiped his forehead with it, slowly repeating "they are all well. Miss Minnie looking particularly well, I thought."

"Any company at the cottage?"

"No, no company."

"And how did you get on, you four?" asked Clennam, gayly.

"There were five of us," returned his partner. "There was What's-his-name. He was there."

"Who is he?" said Clennam.

"Mr. Henry Gowan."

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Clennam, with unusual vivacity. "Yes! — I forgot him."

"As I mentioned, you may remember," said Daniel Doyce, "he is always there, on Sunday."

"Yes, yes," returned Clennam; "I remember now."

Daniel Doyce, still wiping his forehead, ploddingly repeated, "Yes. He was there, he was there. Oh yes, he was there. And his dog. *He* was there too."

"Miss Meagles is quite attached to — the — dog," observed Clennam.

"Quite so," assented his partner. "More attached to the dog than I am to the man."

"You mean Mr. —?"

"I mean Mr. Gowan, most decidedly," said Daniel Doyce.

There was a gap in the conversation, which Clennam devoted to winding up his watch.

"Perhaps you are a little hasty in your judgment," he said. "Our judgments — I am supposing a general case —"

"Of course," said Doyce.

"Are so liable to be influenced by many considerations, which, almost without our knowing it, are unfair, that it is necessary to keep a guard upon them. For instance, Mr. —"

"Gowan," quietly said Doyce, upon whom the utterance of the name almost always devolved.

"Is young and handsome, easy and quick, has talent, and has seen a good deal of various kinds of life. It might be difficult to give an unselfish reason for being prepossessed against him."

"Not difficult for me, I think, Clennam," returned his partner. "I see him bringing present anxiety, and, I fear, future sorrow, into my old friend's house. I see him wearing deeper lines into my old friend's face, the nearer he draws to, and the oftener he looks at, the face of his daughter. In short, I see him with a net about

the pretty and affectionate creature whom he will never make happy."

"We don't know," said Clennam, almost in the tone of a man in pain, "that he will not make her happy."

"We don't know," returned his partner, "that the earth will last another hundred years, but we think it highly probable."

"Well, well!" said Clennam, "we must be hopeful, and we must at least try to be, if not generous (which, in this case, we have no opportunity of being), just. We will not disparage this gentleman, because he is successful in his addresses to the beautiful object of his ambition; and we will not question her natural right to bestow her love on one whom she finds worthy of it."

"May be, my friend," said Doyce. "May be also, that she is too young and petted, too confiding and inexperienced, to discriminate well."

"That," said Clennam, "would be far beyond our power of correction."

Daniel Doyce shook his head gravely, and rejoined, "I fear so."

"Therefore, in a word," said Clennam, "we should make up our minds that it is not worthy of us to say any ill of Mr. Gowan. It would be a poor thing to gratify a prejudice against him. And I resolve, for my part, not to depreciate him."

"I am not quite so sure of myself, and therefore I reserve my privilege of objecting to him," returned the other. "But, if I am not sure of myself, I am sure of you, Clennam, and I know what an upright man you are, and how much to be respected. Good night, my friend and partner!" He shook his hand in saying this, as if

there had been something serious at the bottom of their conversation ; and they separated.

By this time, they had visited the family on several occasions, and had always observed that even a passing allusion to Mr. Henry Gowan when he was not among them, brought back the cloud which had obscured Mr. Meagles's sunshine on the morning of the chance encounter at the Ferry. If Clennam had ever admitted the forbidden passion into his breast, this period might have been a period of real trial ; under the actual circumstances, doubtless it was nothing — nothing.

Equally, if his heart had given entertainment to that prohibited guest, his silent fighting of his way through the mental condition of this period might have been a little meritorious. In the constant effort not to be betrayed into a new phase of the besetting sin of his experience, the pursuit of selfish objects by low and small means, and to hold instead to some high principle of honor and generosity, there might have been a little merit. In the resolution not even to avoid Mr. Meagles's house, lest, in the selfish sparing of himself, he should bring any slight distress upon the daughter through making her the cause of an estrangement which he believed the father would regret, there might have been a little merit. In the modest truthfulness of always keeping in view the greater equality of Mr. Gowan's years, and the greater attractions of his person and manner, there might have been a little merit. In doing all this and much more, in a perfectly unaffected way and with a manful and composed constancy, while the pain within him (peculiar as his life and history) was very sharp, there might have been some quiet strength of character. But, after the resolution he had made, of

course he could have no such merits as these ; and such a state of mind was nobody's — nobody's.

Mr. Gowan made it no concern of his whether it was nobody's or somebody's. He preserved his perfect serenity of manner on all occasions, as if the possibility of Clennam's presuming to have debated the great question were too distant and ridiculous to be imagined. He had always an affability to bestow on Clennam and an ease to treat him with, which might of itself (in the supposititious case of his not having taken that sagacious course) have been a very uncomfortable element in his state of mind.

"I quite regret you were not with us yesterday," said Mr. Henry Gowan, calling on Clennam next morning. "We had an agreeable day up the river there."

So he had heard, Arthur said.

"From your partner?" returned Henry Gowan. "What a dear old fellow he is!"

"I have a great regard for him."

"By Jove he is the finest creature!" said Gowan. "So fresh, so green, trusts in such wonderful things!"

Here was one of the many little rough points that had a tendency to grate on Clennam's bearing. He put it aside by merely repeating that he had a high regard for Mr. Doyce.

"He is charming! To see him mooning along to that time of life, laying down nothing by the way and picking up nothing by the way, is delightful. It warms a man. So unspoilt, so simple, such a good soul! Upon my life, Mr. Clennam, one feels desperately worldly and wicked, in comparison with such an innocent creature. I speak for myself, let me add, without including you. You are genuine, also."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Clennam, ill at ease; "you are too, I hope?"

"So so," rejoined the other. "To be candid with you, tolerably. I am not a great impostor. Buy one of my pictures, and I assure you, in confidence, it will not be worth the money. Buy one of another man's — any great professor who beats me hollow — and the chances are that the more you give him, the more he'll impose upon you. They all do it."

"All painters?"

"Painters, writers, patriots, all the rest who have stands in the market. Give almost any man I know, ten pounds, and he will impose upon you to a corresponding extent; a thousand pounds — to a corresponding extent; ten thousand pounds — to a corresponding extent. So great the success, so great the imposition. But what a capital world it is!" cried Gowan with warm enthusiasm. "What a jolly, excellent lovable world it is!"

"I had rather thought," said Clennam, "that the principle you mention was chiefly acted on by —"

"By the Barnacles?" interrupted Gowan, laughing.

"By the political gentlemen who condescend to keep the Circumlocution Office."

"Ah! Don't be hard upon the Barnacles," said Gowan, laughing afresh, "they are darling fellows! Even poor little Clarence, the born idiot of the family, is the most agreeable and most endearing blockhead! And by Jupiter, with a kind of cleverness in him too, that would astonish you!"

"It would. Very much," said Clennam, dryly.

"And after all," cried Gowan, with that characteristic balancing of his which reduced everything in the wide world to the same light weight, "though I can't deny

that the Circumlocution Office may ultimately shipwreck everybody and everything, still, that will probably not be in our time — and it's a school for gentlemen."

"It's a very dangerous, unsatisfactory, and expensive school to the people who pay to keep the pupils there, I am afraid," said Clennam, shaking his head.

"Ah! You are a terrible fellow," returned Gowan, airily. "I can understand how you have frightened that little donkey, Clarence, the most estimable of mooncalves (I really love him), nearly out of his wits. But enough of him, and of all the rest of them. I want to present you to my mother, Mr. Clennam. Pray do me the favor to give me the opportunity."

In nobody's state of mind, there was nothing Clennam would have desired less, or would have been more at a loss how to avoid.

"My mother lives in the most primitive manner down in that dreary red-brick dungeon at Hampton Court," said Gowan. "If you would make your own appointment, suggest your own day for permitting me to take you there to dinner, you would be bored and she would be charmed. Really that's the state of the case."

What could Clennam say after this? His retiring character included a great deal that was simple in the best sense, because unpractised and unused; and, in his simplicity and modesty, he could only say that he was happy to place himself at Mr. Gowan's disposal. Accordingly he said it, and the day was fixed. And a dreaded day it was on his part, and a very unwelcome day when it came, and they went down to Hampton Court together.

The venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile seemed, in those times, to be encamped there like a sort of

civilized gypsies. There was a temporary air about their establishments, as if they were going away the moment they could get anything better; there was also a dissatisfied air about themselves, as if they took it very ill that they had not already got something much better. Genteel blinds and make-shifts were more or less observable as soon as their doors were opened; screens not half high enough, which made dining-rooms out of arched passages, and warded off obscure corners where footboys slept at night with their heads among the knives and forks; curtains which called upon you to believe that they didn't hide anything; panes of glass which requested you not to see them; many objects of various forms, feigning to have no connection with their guilty secret, a bed; disguised traps in walls, which were clearly coal-cellars; affectations of no thoroughfares, which were evidently doors to little kitchens. Mental reservations and artful mysteries grew out of these things. Callers, looking steadily into the eyes of their receivers, pretended not to smell cooking three feet off; people, confronting closets accidentally left open, pretended not to see bottles; visitors, with their heads against a partition of thin canvas and a page and a young female at high words on the other side, made believe to be sitting in a primeval silence. There was no end to the small social accommodation-bills of this nature which the gypsies of gentility were constantly drawing upon, and accepting for, one another.

Some of these Bohemians were of an irritable temperament, as constantly soured and vexed by two mental trials: the first, the consciousness that they had never got enough out of the public; the second, the consciousness that the public were admitted into the building. Under

the latter great wrong, a few suffered dreadfully — particularly on Sundays, when they had for some time expected the earth to open and swallow the public up ; but which desirable event had not yet occurred, in consequence of some reprehensible laxity in the arrangements of the Universe.

Mrs. Gowan's door was attended by a family servant of several years' standing, who had his own crow to pluck with the public, concerning a situation in the Post Office which he had been for some time expecting, and to which he was not yet appointed. He perfectly knew that the public could never have got him in, but he grimly gratified himself with the idea that the public kept him out. Under the influence of this injury (and perhaps of some little straitness and irregularity in the matter of wages), he had grown neglectful of his person and morose in mind ; and now beholding in Clennam one of the degraded body of his oppressors, received him with ignominy.

Mrs. Gowan, however, received him with condescension. He found her a courtly old lady, formerly a Beauty, and still sufficiently well-favored to have dispensed with the powder on her nose, and a certain impossible bloom under each eye. She was a little lofty with him : so was another old lady, dark-browed and high-nosed, and who must have had something real about her or she could not have existed, but it was certainly not her hair or her teeth or her figure or her complexion ; so was a gray old gentleman of dignified and sullen appearance ; both of whom had come to dinner. But, as they had all been in the British Embassy way in sundry parts of the earth, and as a British Embassy cannot better establish a character with the Circumlocu-

tion Office than by treating its compatriots with illimitable contempt (else it would become like the Embassies of other countries), Clennam felt that on the whole they let him off lightly.

The dignified old gentleman turned out to be Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking, who had been maintained by the Circumlocution Office for many years as a representative of the Britannic Majesty abroad. This noble Refrigerator had iced several European courts in his time, and had done it with such complete success that the very name of Englishman yet struck cold to the stomachs of foreigners who had the distinguished honor of remembering him, at a distance of a quarter of a century.

He was now in retirement, and hence (in a ponderous white cravat, like a stiff snow-drift) was so obliging as to shade the dinner. There was a whisper of the pervading Bohemian character in the nomadic nature of the service, and its curious races of plates and dishes; but the noble Refrigerator, infinitely better than plate or porcelain, made it superb. He shaded the dinner, cooled the wines, chilled the gravy, and blighted the vegetables.

There was only one other person in the room: a microscopically small footboy, who waited on the malevolent man who hadn't got into the Post Office. Even this youth, if his jacket could have been unbuttoned and his heart laid bare, would have been seen, as a distant adherent of the Barnacle family, already to aspire to a situation under Government.

Mrs. Gowan with a gentle melancholy upon her, occasioned by her son's being reduced to court the swinish public as a follower of the low Arts, instead of asserting his birthright and putting a ring through its nose as an acknowledged Barnacle, headed the conversation at din-

ner on the evil days. It was then that Clennam learned for the first time what little pivots this great world goes round upon.

"If John Barnacle," said Mrs. Gowan, after the degeneracy of the times had been fully ascertained, "if John Barnacle had but abandoned his most unfortunate idea of conciliating the mob, all would have been well, and I think the country would have been preserved."

The old lady with the high nose assented, but added that if Augustus Stiltstalking had in a general way ordered the cavalry out with instructions to charge, she thought the country would have been preserved.

The noble Refrigerator assented; but added that if William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, when they came over to one another and formed their ever-memorable coalition, had boldly muzzled the newspapers, and rendered it penal for any Editor-person to presume to discuss the conduct of any appointed authority abroad or at home, he thought the country would have been preserved.

It was agreed that the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving, but how it came to want preserving was not so clear. It was only clear that the question was all about John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob. And this was the feature of the conversation which impressed Clennam, as a man not used to it, very disagreeably: making him doubt if it were quite right to sit there, silently hearing a great nation narrowed to such little bounds. Remembering, however, that in the Parliamentary de-

bates, whether on the life of that nation's body or the life of its soul, the question was usually all about and between John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, and nobody else; he said nothing on the part of mob, bethinking himself that mob was used to it.

Mr. Henry Gowan seemed to have a malicious pleasure in playing off the three talkers against each other, and in seeing Clennam startled by what they said. Having as supreme a contempt for the class that had thrown him off, as for the class that had not taken him on, he had no personal disquiet in anything that passed. His healthy state of mind appeared even to derive a gratification from Clennam's position of embarrassment and isolation among the good company; and if Clennam had been in that condition with which Nobody was incessantly contending, he would have suspected it, and would have struggled with the suspicion as a meanness, even while he sat at the table.

In the course of a couple of hours the noble Refrigerator, at no time less than a hundred years behind the period, got about five centuries in arrear, and delivered solemn political oracles appropriate to that epoch. He finished by freezing a cup of tea for his own drinking, and retiring at his lowest temperature.

Then Mrs. Gowan, who had been accustomed in her days of state to retain a vacant arm-chair beside her to which to summon her devoted slaves, one by one, for short audiences as marks of her especial favor, invited Clennam with a turn of her fan to approach the presence. He obeyed, and took the tripod recently vacated by Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking.

"Mr. Clennam," said Mrs. Gowan, "apart from the happiness I have in becoming known to you, though in this odiously inconvenient place — a mere barrack — there is a subject on which I am dying to speak to you. It is the subject in connection with which my son first had, I believe, the pleasure of cultivating your acquaintance."

Clennam inclined his head, as a generally suitable reply to what he did not yet quite understand.

"First," said Mrs. Gowan, "now is she really pretty?"

In nobody's difficulties, he would have found it very difficult to answer; very difficult indeed to smile, and say "Who?"

"Oh! You know!" she returned. "This flame of Henry's. This unfortunate fancy. There! If it is a point of honor that I should originate the name — Miss Mickles — Miggles."

"Miss Meagles," said Clennam, "is very beautiful."

"Men are so often mistaken on those points," returned Mrs. Gowan, shaking her head, "that I candidly confess to you I feel anything but sure of it, even now; though it is something to have Henry corroborated with so much gravity and emphasis. He picked the people up at Rome, I think?"

The phrase would have given nobody mortal offence. Clennam replied "Excuse me, I doubt if I understand your expression."

"Picked the people up," said Mrs. Gowan, tapping the sticks of her closed fan (a large green one, which she used as a hand-screen) upon her little table. "Came upon them. Found them out. Stumbled against them."

"The people?"

"Yes. The Miggles people."

"I really cannot say," said Clennam, "where my friend Mr. Meagles first presented Mr. Henry Gowan to his daughter."

"I am pretty sure he picked her up at Rome; but never mind where — somewhere. Now (this is entirely between ourselves), is she very plebeian?"

"Really, ma'am," returned Clennam, "I am so undoubtedly plebeian myself, that I do not feel qualified to judge."

"Very neat," said Mrs. Gowan, coolly unfurling her screen. "Very happy! From which I infer that you secretly think her manner equal to her looks?"

Clennam, after a moment's stiffness, bowed.

"That's comforting, and I hope you may be right. Did Henry tell me you had travelled with them?"

"I travelled with my friend Mr. Meagles, and his wife and daughter, during some months." (Nobody's heart might have been wrung by the remembrance.)

"Really comforting, because you must have had a large experience of them. You see, Mr. Clennam, this thing has been going on for a long time, and I find no improvement in it. Therefore to have the opportunity of speaking to one so well informed about it as yourself, is an immense relief to me. Quite a boon. Quite a blessing, I am sure."

"Pardon me," returned Clennam, "but I am not in Mr. Henry Gowan's confidence. I am far from being so well informed as you suppose me to be. Your mistake makes my position a very delicate one. No word on this topic has ever passed between Mr. Henry Gowan and myself."

Mrs. Gowan glanced at the other end of the room, where her son was playing *écarté* on a sofa, with the old lady who was for a charge of cavalry.

"Not in his confidence? No," said Mrs. Gowan. "No word has passed between you? No. That I can imagine. But there are unexpressed confidences, Mr. Clennam; and as you have been together intimately among these people, I cannot doubt that a confidence of that sort exists in the present case. Perhaps you have heard that I have suffered the keenest distress of mind from Henry's having taken to a pursuit which — well!" shrugging her shoulders, "a very respectable pursuit, I dare say, and some artists are, as artists, quite superior persons; still, we never yet in our family have gone beyond an Amateur, and it is a pardonable weakness to feel a little —"

As Mrs. Gowan broke off to heave a sigh, Clennam, however resolute to be magnanimous, could not keep down the thought that there was mighty little danger of the family's ever going beyond an Amateur, even as it was.

"Henry," the mother resumed, "is self-willed and resolute; and as these people naturally strain every nerve to catch him, I can entertain very little hope, Mr. Clennam, that the thing will be broken off. I apprehend the girl's fortune will be very small; Henry might have done much better; there is scarcely anything to compensate for the connection: still, he acts for himself; and if I find no improvement within a short time, I see no other course than to resign myself, and make the best of these people. I am infinitely obliged to you for what you have told me."

As she shrugged her shoulders, Clennam stiffly bowed

again. With an uneasy flush upon his face, and hesitation in his manner, he then said, in a still lower tone than he had adopted yet :

"Mrs. Gowan, I scarcely know how to acquit myself of what I feel to be a duty, and yet I must ask you for your kind consideration in attempting to discharge it. A misconception on your part, a very great misconception if I may venture to call it so, seems to require setting right. You have supposed Mr. Meagles and his family to strain every nerve, I think you said — "

"Every nerve," repeated Mrs. Gowan, looking at him in calm obstinacy, with her green fan between her face and the fire.

"To secure Mr. Henry Gowan? "

The lady placidly assented.

"Now that is so far," said Arthur, "from being the case, that I know Mr. Meagles to be unhappy in this matter ; and to have interposed all reasonable obstacles, with the hope of putting an end to it."

Mrs. Gowan shut up her great green fan, tapped him on the arm with it, and tapped her smiling lips. "Why, of course," said she. "Just what I mean."

Arthur watched her face for some explanation of what she did mean.

"Are you really serious, Mr. Clennam? Don't you see? "

Arthur did not see ; and said so.

"Why, don't I know my son, and don't I know that this is exactly the way to hold him? " said Mrs. Gowan, contemptuously ; "and do not these Miggles people know it, at least as well as I? Oh, shrewd people, Mr. Clennam : evidently people of business! I believe Miggles belonged to a Bank. It ought to have been a very prof-

itable Bank, if he had much to do with its management. This is very well done, indeed."

"I beg and entreat you, ma'am —" Arthur interposed.

"Oh Mr. Clennam, can you really be so credulous!"

It made such a painful impression upon him to hear her talking in this haughty tone, and to see her patting her contemptuous lips with her fan, that he said very earnestly, "Believe me, ma'am, this is unjust, a perfectly groundless suspicion."

"Suspicion?" repeated Mrs. Gowan. "Not suspicion, Mr. Clennam, Certainty. It is very knowingly done indeed, and seems to have taken *you* in completely." She laughed; and again sat tapping her lips with her fan, and tossing her head, as if she added, "Don't tell me. I know such people will do anything for the honor of such an alliance."

At this opportune moment, the cards were thrown up, and Mr. Henry Gowan came across the room saying, "Mother, if you can spare Mr. Clennam for this time, we have a long way to go, and it's getting late." Mr. Clennam thereupon rose, as he had no choice but to do; and Mrs. Gowan showed him, to the last, the same look and the same tapped contemptuous lips.

"You have had a portentously long audience of my mother," said Gowan, as the door closed upon them. "I fervently hope she has not bored you?"

"Not at all," said Clennam.

They had a little open phaeton for the journey, and were soon in it on the road home. Gowan, driving, lighted a cigar; Clennam declined one. Do what he would, he fell into such a mood of abstraction, that Gowan said again, "I am very much afraid my mother

has bored you?" To which he roused himself to answer, "Not at all;" and soon relapsed again.

In that state of mind which rendered nobody uneasy, his thoughtfulness would have turned principally on the man at his side. He would have thought of the morning when he first saw him rooting out the stones with his heel, and would have asked himself "Does he jerk me out of the path in the same careless, cruel way?" He would have thought, had this introduction to his mother been brought about by him because he knew what she would say, and that he could thus place his position before a rival and loftily warn him off, without himself reposing a word of confidence in him? He would have thought, even if there were no such design as that, had he brought him there to play with his repressed emotions, and torment him? The current of these meditations would have been stayed sometimes by a rush of shame, bearing a remonstrance to himself from his own open nature, representing that to shelter such suspicions, even for the passing moment, was not to hold the high, unenvious course he had resolved to keep. At those times, the striving within him would have been hardest; and looking up and catching Gowan's eyes, he would have started as if he had done him an injury.

Then, looking at the dark road and its uncertain objects, he would have gradually trailed off again into thinking, "Where are we driving, he and I, I wonder, on the darker road of life? How will it be with us, and with her, in the obscure distance?" Thinking of her, he would have been troubled anew with a reproachful misgiving that it was not even loyal to her to dislike him, and that in being so easily prejudiced against him he was less deserving of her than at first.

"You are evidently out of spirits," said Gowan; "I am very much afraid my mother must have bored you dreadfully."

"Believe me, not at all," said Clennam. "It's nothing — nothing!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIVE-AND-TWENTY.

A FREQUENTLY recurring doubt, whether Mr. Pancks's desire to collect information relative to the Dorrit family could have any possible bearing on the misgivings he had imparted to his mother on his return from his long exile, caused Arthur Clennam much uneasiness at this period. What Mr. Pancks already knew about the Dorrit family, what more he really wanted to find out, and why he should trouble his busy head about them at all, were questions that often perplexed him. Mr. Pancks was not a man to waste his time and trouble in researches prompted by idle curiosity. That he had a specific object, Clennam could not doubt. And whether the attainment of that object by Mr. Pancks's industry might bring to light, in some untimely way, secret reasons which had induced his mother to take Little Dorrit by the hand, was a serious speculation.

Not that he ever wavered, either in his desire or his determination to repair a wrong that had been done in his father's time, should a wrong come to light, and be reparable. The shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death, was so vague and formless that it might be the result of a reality widely remote from his idea of it. But, if his apprehensions should prove to be well founded, he was ready at

any moment to lay down all he had, and begin the world anew. As the fierce dark teaching of his childhood had never sunk into his heart, so the first article in his code of morals was, that he must begin in practical humility, with looking well to his feet on Earth, and that he could never mount on wings of words to Heaven. Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth: these first, as the first steep steps upward. Strait was the gate and narrow was the way; far straiter and narrower than the broad high road paved with vain professions and vain repetitions, moles from other men's eyes and liberal delivery of others to the judgment — all cheap materials, costing absolutely nothing.

No. It was not a selfish fear or hesitation that rendered him uneasy, but a mistrust lest Pancks might not observe his part of the understanding between them, and, making any discovery, might take some course upon it without imparting it to him. On the other hand, when he recalled his conversation with Pancks, and the little reason he had to suppose that there was any likelihood of that strange personage being on that track at all, there were times when he wondered that he made so much of it. Laboring in this sea, as all barks labor in cross seas, he tossed about, and came to no haven.

The removal of Little Dorrit herself from their customary association, did not mend the matter. She was so much out, and so much in her own room, that he began to miss her and to find a blank in her place. He had written to her to inquire if she were better, and she had written back, very gratefully and earnestly, telling him not to be uneasy on her behalf, for she was quite well; but he had not seen her, for what, in their intercourse, was a long time.

He returned home one evening from an interview with her father, who had mentioned that she was out visiting — which was what he always said, when she was hard at work to buy his supper — and found Mr. Meagles in an excited state walking up and down his room. On his opening the door, Mr. Meagles stopped, faced round, and said, —

“Clennam! — Tattycoram!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Lost!”

“Why, bless my heart alive!” cried Clennam, in amazement. “What do you mean?”

“Wouldn’t count five-and-twenty, sir; couldn’t be got to do it; stopped at eight, and took herself off.”

“Left your house?”

“Never to come back,” said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head. “You don’t know that girl’s passionate and proud character. A team of horses couldn’t draw her back now; the bolts and bars of the old Bastille couldn’t keep her.”

“How did it happen? Pray sit down and tell me.”

“As to how it happened, it’s not so easy to relate; because you must have the unfortunate temperament of the poor impetuous girl herself, before you can fully understand it. But it came about in this way. Pet and Mother and I have been having a good deal of talk together of late. I’ll not disguise from you, Clennam, that those conversations have not been of as bright a kind as I could wish; they have referred to our going away again. In proposing to do which, I have had, in fact, an object.”

Nobody’s heart beat quickly.

“An object,” said Mr. Meagles, after a moment’s pause, “that I will not disguise from you, either, Clennam.”

nam. There's an inclination on the part of my dear child which I am sorry for. Perhaps you guess the person. Henry Gowan."

"I was not unprepared to hear it."

"Well!" said Mr. Meagles, with a heavy sigh, "I wish to God you had never had to hear it. However, so it is. Mother and I have done all we could to get the better of it, Clennam. We have tried tender advice, we have tried time, we have tried absence. As yet, of no use. Our late conversations have been upon the subject of going away for another year at least, in order that there might be an entire separation and breaking off for that term. Upon that question, Pet has been unhappy, and therefore Mother and I have been unhappy."

Clennam said that he could easily believe it.

"Well!" continued Mr. Meagles in an apologetic way, "I admit as a practical man, and I am sure Mother would admit as a practical woman, that we do, in families, magnify our troubles and make mountains of our mole-hills, in a way that is calculated to be rather trying to people who look on — to mere outsiders you know, Clennam. Still, Pet's happiness or unhappiness is quite a life or death question with us; and we may be excused, I hope, for making much of it. At all events, it might have been borne by Tattycoram. Now, don't you think so?"

"I do indeed think so," returned Clennam, in most emphatic recognition of this very moderate expectation.

"No, sir," said Mr. Meagles, shaking his head ruefully. "She couldn't stand it. The chafing and firing of that girl, the wearing and tearing of that girl within her own breast, has been such that I have softly said to her again and again in passing her, 'Five-and-twenty, Tattycoram, five-and-twenty!' I heartily wish she could have gone

on counting five-and-twenty day and night, and then 'it wouldn't have happened."

Mr. Meagles, with a despondent countenance in which the goodness of his heart was even more expressed than in his times of cheerfulness and gayety, stroked his face down from his forehead to his chin, and shook his head again.

"I said to Mother (not that it was necessary, for she would have thought it all for herself), we are practical people, my dear, and we know her story; we see, in this unhappy girl, some reflection of what was raging in her mother's heart before ever such a creature as this poor thing was in the world; we'll gloss her temper over, Mother, we won't notice it at present, my dear, we'll take advantage of some better disposition in her, another time. So we said nothing. But, do what we would, it seems as if it was to be; she broke out violently one night."

"How, and why?"

"If you ask me Why," said Mr. Meagles, a little disturbed by the question, for he was far more intent on softening her case than the family's, "I can only refer you to what I have just repeated as having been pretty near my words to Mother. As to How, we had said Good night to Pet in her presence (very affectionately, I must allow), and she had attended Pet up-stairs — you remember she was her maid. Perhaps Pet, having been out of sorts, may have been a little more inconsiderate than usual in requiring services of her: but I don't know that I have any right to say so; she was always thoughtful and gentle."

"The gentlest mistress in the world."

"Thank you, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles, shaking

him by the hand ; " you have often seen them together. Well ! We presently heard this unfortunate Tattycoram loud and angry, and before we could ask what was the matter, Pet came back in a tremble, saying she was frightened of her. Close after her came Tattycoram, in a flaming rage. ' I hate you all three,' says she, stamping her foot at us. ' I am bursting with hate of the whole house.' "

" Upon which you — ? "

" I ? " said Mr. Meagles, with a plain good faith, that might have commanded the belief of Mrs. Gowan herself : " I said, count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram. "

Mr. Meagles again stroked his face and shook his head, with an air of profound regret.

" She was so used to do it, Clennam, that even then, such a picture of passion as you never saw, she stopped short, looked me full in the face, and counted (as I made out) to eight. But she couldn't control herself to go any further. There she broke down, poor thing, and gave the other seventeen to the four winds. Then it all burst out. She detested us, she was miserable with us, she couldn't bear it, she wouldn't bear it, she was determined to go away. She was younger than her young mistress, and would she remain to see *her* always held up as the only creature who was young and interesting, and to be cherished and loved ? No. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't ! What did we think she, Tattycoram, might have been if she had been caressed and cared for in her childhood, like her young mistress ? As good as her ? Ah ! Perhaps fifty times as good. When we pretended to be so fond of one another, we exulted over her ; that was what we did ; we exulted over her, and shamed her. And all in the house did the same. They talked about

their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; they liked to drag them up, before her face. There was Mrs. Ticket, only yesterday, when her little grandchild was with her, had been amused by the child's trying to call her (Tattycoram) by the wretched name we gave her; and had laughed at the name. Why, who didn't; and who were we that we should have a right to name her like a dog or a cat? But, she didn't care. She would take no more benefits from us; she would fling us her name back again, and she would go. She would leave us that minute, nobody should stop her, and we should never hear of her again."

Mr. Meagles had recited all this with such a vivid remembrance of his original, that he was almost as flushed and hot by this time as he described her to have been.

"Ah, well!" he said, wiping his face. "It was of no use trying reason then, with that vehement, panting creature (Heaven knows what her mother's story must have been); so I quietly told her that she should not go at that late hour of night, and I gave her my hand and took her to her room, and locked the house-doors. But she was gone this morning."

"And you know no more of her?"

"No more," returned Mr. Meagles. "I have been hunting about all day. She must have gone very early and very silently. I have found no trace of her, down about us."

"Stay! You want," said Clennam, after a moment's reflection, "to see her? I assume that?"

"Yes, assuredly; I want to give her another chance; Mother and Pet want to give her another chance; come! You yourself," said Mr. Meagles, persuasively, as if the

provocation to be angry were not his own at all, "want to give the poor, passionate girl another chance, I know, Clennam."

"It would be strange and hard indeed if I did not," said Clennam, "when you are all so forgiving. What I was going to ask you was, have you thought of that Miss Wade?"

"I have. I did not think of her until I had pervaded the whole of our neighborhood, and I don't know that I should have done so then, but for finding Mother and Pet, when I went home, full of the idea that Tattycoram must have gone to her. Then, of course, I recalled what she said that day at dinner when you were first with us."

"Have you any idea where Miss Wade is to be found?"

"To tell you the truth," returned Mr. Meagles, "it's because I have an addled jumble of a notion on that subject, that you found me waiting here. There is one of those odd impressions in my house which do mysteriously get into houses sometimes, which nobody seems to have picked up in a distinct form from anybody, and yet which everybody seems to have got hold of loosely from somebody and let go again, that she lives, or was living, thereabouts." Mr. Meagles handed him a slip of paper, on which was written the name of one of the dull by-streets in the Grosvenor region, near Park Lane.

"Here is no number," said Arthur, looking over it.

"No number, my dear Clennam?" returned his friend. "No anything! The very name of the street may have been floating in the air, for, as I tell you, none of my people can say where they got it from. However, it's worth an inquiry; and as I would rather make it in company than alone, and as you too were a fellow-traveller

of that immovable woman's, I thought perhaps — " Clennam finished the sentence for him by taking up his hat again, and saying he was ready.

It was now summer-time ; a gray, hot, dusty evening. They rode to the top of Oxford Street, and there alighting, dived in among the great streets of melancholy stateliness, and the little streets that try to be as stately and succeed in being more melancholy, of which there is a labyrinth near Park Lane. Wildernesses of corner-houses, with barbarous old porticos and appurtenances ; horrors that came into existence under some wrong-headed person in some wrong-headed time, still demanding the blind admiration of all ensuing generations and determined to do so until they tumbled down ; frowned upon the twilight. Parasite little tenements with the cramp in their whole frame, from the dwarf hall-door on the giant model of His Grace's in the Square, to the squeezed window of the boudoir commanding the dunghills in the Mews, made the evening doleful. Rickety dwellings of undoubted fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell, looked like the last result of the great mansions' breeding in-and-in ; and, where their little supplementary bows and balconies were supported on thin iron columns, seemed to be scrofulously resting upon crutches. Here and there a Hatchment, with the whole science of Heraldry in it, loomed down upon the street like an Archbishop discoursing on Vanity. The shops, few in number, made no show ; for popular opinion was as nothing to them. The pastry-cook knew who was on his books, and in that knowledge could be calm, with a few glass cylinders of dowager peppermint-drops in his window, and half a dozen ancient specimens of currant jelly. A few oranges formed the greengrocer's

whole concession to the vulgar mind. A single basket made of moss, once containing plovers' eggs, held all that the poulterer had to say to the rabble. Everybody in those streets seemed (which is always the case at that hour and season) to be gone out to dinner, and nobody seemed to be giving the dinners they had gone to. On the door-steps there were lounging, footmen with bright party-colored plumage and white polls, like an extinct race of monstrous birds; and butlers, solitary men of recluse demeanor, each of whom appeared distrustful of all other butlers. The roll of carriages in the Park was done for the day; the street lamps were lighting; and wicked little grooms in the tightest fitting garments, with twists in their legs answering to the twists in their minds, hung about in pairs, chewing straws and exchanging fraudulent secrets. The spotted dogs who went out with the carriages, and who were so associated with splendid equipages, that it looked like a condescension in those animals to come out without them, accompanied helpers to and fro on messages. Here and there was a retiring public-house which did not require to be supported on the shoulders of the people, and where gentlemen out of livery were not much wanted.

This last discovery was made by the two friends in pursuing their inquiries. Nothing was there, or anywhere, known of such a person as Miss Wade, in connection with the street they sought. It was one of the parasite streets; long, regular, narrow, dull, and gloomy; like a brick and mortar funeral. They inquired at several little area gates, where a dejected youth stood spiking his chin on the summit of a precipitous little shoot of wooden steps, but could gain no information. They walked up the street on one side of the way, and down

it on the other, what time two vociferous news-sellers, announcing an extraordinary event that had never happened and never would happen, pitched their hoarse voices into the secret chambers ; but nothing came of it. At length they stood at the corner from which they had begun, and it had fallen quite dark, and they were no wiser.

It happened that in the street they had several times passed a dingy house, apparently empty, with bills in the windows, announcing that it was to let. The bills, as a variety in the funeral procession, almost amounted to a decoration. Perhaps because they kept the house separate in his mind, or perhaps because Mr. Meagles and himself had twice agreed in passing, "It is clear she don't live there," Clennam now proposed that they should go back and try that house before finally going away. Mr. Meagles agreed, and back they went.

They knocked once, and they rang once, without any response. "Empty," said Mr. Meagles, listening. "Once more," said Clennam, and knocked again. After that knock they heard a movement below, and somebody shuffling up towards the door.

The confined entrance was so dark, that it was impossible to make out distinctly what kind of person opened the door ; but it appeared to be an old woman. "Excuse our troubling you," said Clennam. "Pray can you tell us where Miss Wade lives?" The voice in the darkness unexpectedly replied, "Lives here."

"Is she at home?"

No answer coming, Mr. Meagles asked again. "Pray, is she at home?"

After another delay, "I suppose she is," said the voice abruptly ; "you had better come in, and I'll ask."

They were summarily shut into the close black house ; and the figure rustling away, and speaking from a higher level, said, "Come up if you please ; you can't tumble over anything." They groped their way up-stairs towards a faint light, which proved to be the light of the street shining through a window ; and the figure left them shut up in an airless room.

"This is odd, Clennam," said Mr. Meagles, softly.

"Odd enough," assented Clennam, in the same tone, "but we have succeeded ; that's the main point. Here's a light coming !"

The light was a lamp, and the bearer was an old woman : very dirty, very wrinkled and dry. "She's at home," she said (and the voice was the same that had spoken before) ; "she'll come directly." Having set the lamp down on the table, the old woman dusted her hands on her apron, which she might have done forever without cleaning them, looked at the visitors with a dim pair of eyes, and backed out.

The lady whom they had come to see, if she were the present occupant of the house, appeared to have taken up her quarters there, as she might have established herself in an Eastern caravansary. A small square of carpet in the middle of the room, a few articles of furniture that evidently did not belong to the room, and a disorder of trunks and travelling articles, formed the whole of her surroundings. Under some former regular inhabitant, the stifling little apartment had broken out into a pier-glass and a gilt table ; but the gilding was as faded as last year's flowers, and the glass was so clouded that it seemed to hold in magic preservation all the fogs and bad weather it had ever reflected. The

visitors had had a minute or two to look about them, when the door opened and Miss Wade came in.

She was exactly the same as when they had parted. Just as handsome, just as scornful, just as repressed. She manifested no surprise in seeing them, nor any other emotion. She requested them to be seated; and declining to take a seat herself, at once anticipated any introduction of their business.

"I apprehend," she said, "that I know the cause of your favoring me with this visit. We may come to it at once."

"The cause then, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "is Tatycoram."

"So I supposed."

"Miss Wade," said Mr. Meagles, "will you be so kind as to say whether you know anything of her?"

"Surely. I know she is here with me."

"Then, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "allow me to make known to you that I shall be happy to have her back, and that my wife and daughter will be happy to have her back. She has been with us a long time, we don't forget her claims upon us, and I hope we know how to make allowances."

"You hope you know how to make allowances?" she returned, in a level, measured voice. "For what?"

"I think my friend would say, Miss Wade," Arthur Clennam interposed, seeing Mr. Meagles rather at a loss, "for the passionate sense that sometimes comes upon the poor girl, of being at a disadvantage. Which occasionally gets the better of better remembrances."

The lady broke into a smile as she turned her eyes upon him. "Indeed?" was all she answered.

She stood by the table so perfectly composed and still

after this acknowledgment of his remark, that Mr. Meagles stared at her under a sort of fascination, and could not even look to Clennam to make another move. After waiting, awkwardly enough, for some moments, Arthur said :

"Perhaps it would be well if Mr. Meagles could see her, Miss Wade?"

"That is easily done," said she. "Come here, child." She had opened a door while saying this, and now led the girl in by the hand. It was very curious to see them standing together: the girl with her disengaged fingers plaiting the bosom of her dress, half irresolutely, half passionately; Miss Wade with her composed face attentively regarding her, and suggesting to an observer with extraordinary force, in her composure itself (as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the unquenchable passion of her own nature.

"See here," she said, in the same level way as before. "Here is your patron, your master. He is willing to take you back, my dear, if you are sensible of the favor and choose to go. You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman's daughter, Harriet, and kept before her, as a living reminder of her own superiority and her gracious condescension. You can recover all these advantages, and many more of the same kind which I dare say start up in your memory while I speak, and which you lose in taking refuge with me — you can recover them all,

by telling these gentlemen how humbled and penitent you are, and by going back with them to be forgiven. What do you say, Harriet? Will you go?"

The girl who, under the influence of these words, had gradually risen in anger and heightened in color, answered, raising her lustrous black eyes for the moment, and clenching her hand upon the folds it had been puckering up, "I'd die sooner!"

Miss Wade, still standing at her side holding her hand, looked quietly round and said with a smile, "Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?"

Poor Mr. Meagles's inexpressible consternation in hearing his motives and actions so perverted, had prevented him from interposing any word until now; but now he regained the power of speech.

"Tattycoram," said he, "for I'll call you by that name still, my good girl, conscious that I meant nothing but kindness when I gave it to you, and conscious that you know it—"

"I don't!" said she, looking up again, and almost rending herself with the same busy hand.

"No, not now, perhaps," said Mr. Meagles, "not with that lady's eyes so intent upon you, Tattycoram," she glanced at them for a moment, "and that power over you which we see she exercises; not now, perhaps, but at another time. Tattycoram, I'll not ask that lady whether she believes what she has said, even in the anger and ill blood in which I and my friend here equally know she has spoken, though she subdues herself with a determination that any one who has once seen her is not likely to forget. I'll not ask you, with your remembrance of my house and all belonging to it, whether you believe it. I'll only say that you have no

profession to make to me or mine, and no forgiveness to entreat; and that all in the world that I ask you to do, is, to count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram."

She looked at him for an instant, and then said frowningly, "I won't. Miss Wade, take me away, please."

The contention that raged within her had no softening in it now; it was wholly between passionate defiance and stubborn defiance. Her rich color, her quick blood, her rapid breath, were all setting themselves against the opportunity of retracing her steps. "I won't. I won't. I won't!" she repeated in a low, thick voice. "I'd be torn to pieces first. I'd tear myself to pieces first!"

Miss Wade, who had released her hold, laid her hand protectingly on the girl's neck for a moment, and then said, looking round with her former smile, and speaking exactly in her former tone, "Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?"

"Oh, Tattycoram, Tattycoram!" cried Mr. Meagles, adjuring her besides with an earnest hand. "Hear that lady's voice, look at that lady's face, consider what is in that lady's heart, and think what a future lies before you. My child, whatever you may think, that lady's influence over you — astonishing to us, and I should hardly go too far in saying terrible to us, to see — is founded in passion fiercer than yours and temper more violent than yours. What can you two be together? What can come of it?"

"I am alone here, gentlemen," observed Miss Wade, with no change of voice or manner. "Say anything you will."

"Politeness must yield to this misguided girl, ma'am," said Mr. Meagles, "at her present pass; though I hope not altogether to dismiss it, even with the injury you do

her so strongly before me. Excuse me for reminding you in her hearing — I must say it — that you were a mystery to all of us, and had nothing in common with any of us, when she unfortunately fell in your way. I don't know what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself."

"Gentlemen!" said Miss Wade, calmly. "When you have concluded — Mr. Clennam, perhaps you will induce your friend —"

"Not without another effort," said Mr. Meagles, stoutly. "Tattycoram, my poor dear girl, count five-and-twenty."

"Do not reject the hope, the certainty, this kind man offers you," said Clennam, in a low emphatic voice. "Turn to the friends you have not forgotten. Think once more!"

"I won't! Miss Wade," said the girl, with her bosom swelling high, and speaking with her hand held to her throat, "take me away!"

"Tattycoram," said Mr. Meagles. "Once more yet! The only thing I ask of you in the world, my child! Count five-and-twenty!"

She put her hands tightly over her ears, confusedly tumbling down her bright black hair in the vehemence of the action, and turned her face resolutely to the wall. Miss Wade, who had watched her under this final appeal with that strange attentive smile, and that repressing hand upon her own bosom, with which she had watched

her in her struggle at Marseilles, then put her arm about her waist as if she took possession of her forevermore.

And there was a visible triumph in her face when she turned it to dismiss the visitors.

"As it is the last time I shall have this honor," she said, "and as you have spoken of not knowing what I am, and also of the foundation of my influence here, you may now know that it is founded in a common cause. What your broken plaything is as to birth, I am. She has no name, I have no name. Her wrong is my wrong. I have nothing more to say to you."

This was addressed to Mr. Meagles, who sorrowfully went out. As Clennam followed, she said to him, with the same external composure and in the same level voice, but with a smile that is only seen on cruel faces: a very faint smile, lifting the nostril, scarcely touching the lips, and not breaking away gradually, but instantly dismissed when done with:

"I hope the wife of your dear friend, Mr. Gowan, may be happy in the contrast of her extraction to this girl's and mine, and in the high good fortune that awaits her."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NOBODY'S DISAPPEARANCE.

NOT resting satisfied with the endeavors he had made to recover his lost charge, Mr. Meagles addressed a letter of remonstrance, breathing nothing but good-will, not only to her, but to Miss Wade too. No answer coming to these epistles, or to another written to the stubborn girl by the hand of her late young mistress, which might have melted her if anything could (all three letters were returned weeks afterwards as having been refused at the house-door), he deputed Mrs. Meagles to make the experiment of a personal interview. That worthy lady being unable to obtain one, and being steadfastly denied admission, Mr. Meagles besought Arthur to essay once more what he could do. All that came of his compliance was, his discovery that the empty house was left in charge of the old woman, that Miss Wade was gone, that the waifs and strays of furniture were gone, and that the old woman would accept any number of halfcrowns and thank the donor kindly, but had no information whatever to exchange for those coins, beyond constantly offering for perusal a memorandum relative to fixtures, which the house-agent's young man had left in the hall.

Unwilling, even under this discomfiture, to resign the ingrate and leave her hopeless, in case of her better dispositions obtaining the mastery over the darker side of

her character, Mr. Meagles, for six successive days, published a discreetly covert advertisement in the morning papers, to the effect that if a certain young person who had lately left home without reflection, would at any time apply at his address at Twickenham, everything would be as it had been before, and no reproaches need be apprehended. The unexpected consequences of this notification, suggested to the dismayed Mr. Meagles for the first time that some hundreds of young persons must be leaving their homes without reflection, every day; for, shoals of wrong young people came down to Twickenham, who, not finding themselves received with enthusiasm, generally demanded compensation by way of damages, in addition to coach-hire there and back. Nor were these the only uninvited clients whom the advertisement produced. The swarm of begging-letter writers who would seem to be always watching eagerly for any hook, however small, to hang a letter upon, wrote to say that having seen the advertisement, they were induced to apply with confidence for various sums, ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds: not because they knew anything about the young person, but because they felt that to part with those donations would greatly relieve the advertiser's mind. Several projectors, likewise, availed themselves of the same opportunity to correspond with Mr. Meagles; as, for example, to apprise him that their attention having been called to the advertisement by a friend, they begged to state that if they should ever hear anything of the young person, they would not fail to make it known to him immediately, and that in the mean time if he would oblige them with the funds necessary for bringing to perfection a certain entirely novel description of Pump, the happiest results would ensue to mankind.

Mr. Meagles and his family, under these combined discouragements, had begun reluctantly to give up Tattycoram as irrecoverable, when the new and active firm of Doyce and Clennam, in their private capacities, went down on a Saturday to stay at the cottage until Monday. The senior partner took the coach, and the junior partner took his walking-stick.

A tranquil summer sunset shone upon him as he approached the end of his walk, and passed through the meadows by the river-side. He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest. In the occasional leap of a fish, or dip of an oar, or twittering of a bird not yet at roost, or distant barking of a dog, or lowing of a cow — in all such sounds, there was the prevailing breath of rest, which seemed to encompass him in every scent that sweetened the fragrant air. The long lines of red and gold in the sky, and the glorious track of the descending sun, were all divinely calm. Upon the purple tree-tops far away, and on the green height near at hand up which the shades were slowly creeping, there was an equal hush. Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water, there was no division ; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully reassuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful.

Clennam had stopped, not for the first time by many times, to look about him and suffer what he saw to sink into his soul, as the shadows, looked at, seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the water. He was slowly resuming his way, when he saw a figure in the path before him which he had, perhaps, already associated with the evening and its impressions.

Minnie was there, alone. She had some roses in her hand, and seemed to have stood still on seeing him, waiting for him. Her face was towards him, and she appeared to have been coming from the opposite direction. There was a flutter in her manner, which Clennam had never seen in it before ; and as he came near her, it entered his mind all at once that she was there of a set purpose to speak to him.

She gave him her hand, and said, "You wonder to see me here by myself? But the evening is so lovely, I have strolled further than I meant at first. I thought it likely I might meet you, and that made me more confident. You always come this way, do you not?"

As Clennam said that it was his favorite way, he felt her hand falter on his arm, and saw the roses shake.

"Will you let me give you one, Mr. Clennam? I gathered them as I came out of the garden. Indeed, I almost gathered them for you, thinking it so likely I might meet you. Mr. Doyce arrived more than an hour ago, and told us you were walking down."

His own hand shook, as he accepted a rose or two from hers, and thanked her. They were now by an avenue of trees. Whether they turned into it on his movement or on hers, matters little. He never knew how that was.

"It is very grave here," said Clennam, "but very

pleasant at this hour. Passing along this deep shade, and out at that arch of light at the other end, we come upon the ferry and the cottage by the best approach, I think."

In her simple garden-hat and her light summer dress, with her rich brown hair naturally clustering about her, and her wonderful eyes raised to his for a moment, with a look in which regard for him and trustfulness in him were strikingly blended with a kind of timid sorrow for him, she was so beautiful, that it was well for his peace — or ill for his peace, he did not quite know which — that he had made that vigorous resolution he had so often thought about.

She broke a momentary silence by inquiring if he knew that papa had been thinking of another tour abroad? He said he had heard it mentioned. She broke another momentary silence by adding, with some hesitation, that papa had abandoned the idea.

At this, he thought directly, "they are to be married."

"Mr. Clennam," she said, hesitating more timidly yet, and speaking so low that he bent his head to hear her. "I should very much like to give you my confidence, if you would not mind having the goodness to receive it. I should have very much liked to have given it to you long ago, because — I felt that you were becoming so much our friend."

"How can I be otherwise than proud of it at any time! Pray give it to me. Pray trust me."

"I could never have been afraid of trusting you," she returned, raising her eyes frankly to his face. "I think I would have done so some time ago, if I had known how. But I scarcely know how, even now."

"Mr. Gowan," said Arthur Clennam, "has reason to be very happy. God bless his wife and him!"

She wept, as she tried to thank him. He reassured her, took her hand as it lay with the trembling roses in it on his arm, took the remaining roses from it, and put it to his lips. At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart, so much to its pain and trouble; and from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man who had done with that part of life.

He put the roses in his breast, and they walked on for a little while, slowly and silently, under the umbrageous trees. Then he asked her, in a voice of cheerful kindness, was there anything else that she would say to him as her friend and her father's friend, many years older than herself; was there any trust she would repose in him, any service she would ask of him, any little aid to her happiness that she could give him the lasting gratification of believing it was in his power to render?

She was going to answer, when she was so touched by some little hidden sorrow or sympathy — what could it have been? — that she said, bursting into tears again: "O, Mr. Clennam! Good, generous, Mr. Clennam, pray tell me you do not blame me."

"I blame you?" said Clennam. "My dearest girl! I blame you? No!"

After clasping both her hands upon his arm, and looking confidentially up into his face, with some hurried words to the effect that she thanked him from her heart (as indeed she did, if it be the source of earnestness), she gradually composed herself, with now and then a

word of encouragement from him, as they walked on slowly and almost silently under the darkening trees.

"And, now, Minnie Gowan," at length, said Clennam, smiling; "will you ask me nothing?"

"Oh! I have very much to ask of you."

"That's well! I hoped so; I am not disappointed."

"You know how I am loved at home, and how I love home. You can hardly think it perhaps, dear Mr. Clennam," she spoke with great agitation, "seeing me going from it of my own free will and choice, but I do so dearly love it!"

"I am sure of that," said Clennam. "Can you suppose I doubt it!"

"No, no. But it is strange, even to me, that loving it so much and being so much beloved in it, I can bear to cast it away. It seems so neglectful of it, so unthankful."

"My dear girl," said Clennam, "it is in the natural progress and change of time. All homes are left so."

"Yes, I know; but all homes are not left with such a blank in them as there will be in mine when I am gone. Not that there is any scarcity of far better and more endearing and more accomplished girls than I am; not that I am much; but that they have made so much of me!"

Pet's affectionate heart was overcharged, and she sobbed while she pictured what would happen.

"I know what a change papa will feel at first, and I know that at first I cannot be to him anything like what I have been these many years. And it is then, Mr. Clennam, then more than at any time, that I beg and entreat you to remember him, and sometimes to keep him company when you can spare a little while; and to tell

him that you know I was fonder of him, when I left him, than I ever was in all my life. For there is nobody — he told me so himself when he talked to me this very day — there is nobody he likes so well as you, or trusts so much.”

A clue to what had passed between the father and daughter dropped like a heavy stone into the well of Clennam's heart, and swelled the water to his eyes. He said, cheerily, but not quite so cheerily as he tried to say, that it should be done: that he gave her his faithful promise.

“If I do not speak of mamma,” said Pet, more moved by, and more pretty in, her innocent grief, than Clennam could trust himself even now to consider — for which reason he counted the trees between them and the fading light as they slowly diminished in number — “it is because mamma will understand me better in this action, and will feel my loss in a different way, and will look forward in a different manner. But you know what a dear, devoted mother she is, and you will remember her, too; will you not?”

Let Minnie trust him, Clennam said, let Minnie trust him to do all she wished.

“And, dear Mr. Clennam,” said Minnie, “because papa and one whom I need not name, do not fully appreciate and understand one another yet, as they will by and by; and because it will be the duty, and the pride, and pleasure of my new life, to draw them to a better knowledge of one another, and to be a happiness to one another, and to be proud of one another, and to love one another, both loving me so dearly; O, as you are a kind, true man! when I am first separated from home (I am going a long distance away), try to reconcile papa to him

a little more, and use your great influence to keep him before papa's mind, free from prejudice and in his real form. Will you do this for me, as you are a noble-hearted friend?"

Poor Pet! Self-deceived, mistaken child! When were such changes ever made in men's natural relations to one another: when was such reconciliation of ingrain differences ever effected! It has been tried many times by other daughters, Minnie; it has never succeeded; nothing has ever come of it but failure.

So Clennam thought. So he did not say; it was too late. He bound himself to do all she asked, and she knew full well that he would do it.

They were now at the last tree in the avenue. She stopped, and withdrew her arm. Speaking to him with her eyes lifted up to his, and with the hand that had lately rested on his sleeve tremblingly touching one of the roses in his breast as an additional appeal to him, she said:

"Dear Mr. Clennam, in my happiness—for I am happy, though you have seen me crying—I cannot bear to leave any cloud between us. If you have anything to forgive me (not anything that I have wilfully done, but any trouble I may have caused you without meaning it, or having it in my power to help it), forgive me to-night out of your noble heart!"

He stooped to meet the guileless face that met his without shrinking. He kissed it, and answered, Heaven knew that he had nothing to forgive. As he stooped to meet the innocent face once again, she whispered "Good-by!" and he repeated it. It was taking leave of all his old hopes—all nobody's old restless doubts. They came out of the avenue next moment, arm-in-arm as they had

entered it ; and the trees seemed to close up behind them in the darkness, like their own perspective of the past.

The voices of Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, and Doyce, were audible directly, speaking near the garden gate. Hearing Pet's name among them, Clennam called out "She is here, with me." There was some little wondering and laughing until they came up ; but as soon as they had all come together, it ceased, and Pet glided away.

Mr. Meagles, Doyce, and Clennam, without speaking, walked up and down on the brink of the river, in the light of the rising moon, for a few minutes ; and then Doyce lingered behind, and went into the house. Mr. Meagles and Clennam walked up and down together for a few minutes more without speaking, until at length the former broke silence.

"Arthur," said he, using that familiar address for the first time in their communication, "do you remember my telling you, as we walked up and down one hot morning, looking over the harbor at Marseilles, that Pet's baby sister who was dead seemed to Mother and me to have grown as she had grown, and changed as she had changed?"

"Very well."

"You remember my saying that our thoughts had never been able to separate those twin sisters, and that in our fancy whatever Pet was, the other was?"

"Yes, very well."

"Arthur," said Mr. Meagles, much subdued, "I carry that fancy further to-night. I feel to-night, my dear fellow, as if you had loved my dead child very tenderly, and had lost her when she was like what Pet is now."

"Thank you," murmured Clennam, "thank you!" And pressed his hand.

"Will you come in?" said Mr. Meagles, presently.

"In a little while."

Mr. Meagles fell away, and he was left alone. When he had walked on the river's brink in the peaceful moonlight, for some half an hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore, and gently launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away.

The lights were bright within doors when he entered, and the faces on which they shone, his own face not excepted, were soon quietly cheerful. They talked of many subjects (his partner never had had such a ready store to draw upon for the beguiling of the time), and so to bed, and to sleep. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. FLINTWINCH GOES ON DREAMING.

THE house in the city preserved its heavy dulness through all these transactions, and the invalid within it turned the same unvarying round of life. Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, each recurring with its accompanying monotony, always the same reluctant return of the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork.

The wheeled chair had its associated remembrances and reveries, one may suppose, as every place that is made the station of a human being has. Pictures of demolished streets and altered houses, as they formerly were when the occupant of the chair was familiar with them ; images of people as they too used to be, with little or no allowance made for the lapse of time since they were seen ; of these, there must have been many in the long routine of gloomy days. To stop the clock of busy existence, at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it ; to suppose mankind stricken motionless, when we were brought to a standstill ; to be unable to measure the changes beyond our view, by any larger standard than the shrunken one of our own uniform and contracted existence ; is the infirmity of many invalids, and the mental unhealthiness of almost all recluses.

What scenes and actors the stern woman most re-

viewed, as she sat from season to season in her one dark room, none knew but herself. Mr. Flintwinch, with his wry presence brought to bear upon her daily like some eccentric mechanical force, would perhaps have screwed it out of her, if there had been less resistance in her; but she was too strong for him. So far as Mistress Affery was concerned, to regard her liege-lord and her disabled mistress with a face of blank wonder, to go about the house after dark with her apron over her head, always to listen for the strange noises and sometimes to hear them, and never to emerge from her ghostly, dreamy, sleep-waking state, was occupation enough for her.

There was a fair stroke of business doing, as Mistress Affery made out, for her husband had abundant occupation in his little office, and saw more people than had been used to come there for some years. This might easily be, the house having been long deserted; but he did receive letters, and comers, and keep books, and correspond. Moreover, he went about to other counting-houses, and to wharves, and docks, and to the Custom House, and to Garraway's Coffee House, and the Jerusalem Coffee House, and on 'Change; so that he was much in and out. He began, too, sometimes of an evening, when Mrs. Clennam expressed no particular wish for his society, to resort to a tavern in the neighborhood to look at the shipping news and closing prices in the evening paper, and even to exchange small socialities with mercantile Sea Captains who frequented that establishment. At some period of every day, he and Mrs. Clennam held a council on matters of business; and it appeared to Affery, who was always groping about, listening and watching, that the two clever ones were making money.

The state of mind into which Mr. Flintwinch's dazed lady had fallen, had now begun to be so expressed in all her looks and actions, that she was held in very low account by the two clever ones, as a person, never of strong intellect, who was becoming foolish. Perhaps because her appearance was not of a commercial cast, or perhaps because it occurred to him that his having taken her to wife might expose his judgment to doubt in the minds of customers, Mr. Flintwinch laid his commands upon her that she should hold her peace on the subject of her conjugal relations, and should no longer call him Jeremiah out of the domestic trio. Her frequent forgetfulness of this admonition intensified her startled manner, since Mr. Flintwinch's habit of avenging himself on her remissness by making springs after her on the staircase, and shaking her, occasioned her to be always nervously uncertain when she might be thus waylaid next.

Little Dorrit had finished a long day's work in Mrs. Clennam's room, and was neatly gathering up her shreds and odds and ends before going home. Mr. Pancks, whom Affery had just shown in, was addressing an inquiry to Mrs. Clennam on the subject of her health, coupled with the remark that, "happening to find himself in that direction," he had looked in to inquire, on behalf of his proprietor, how she found herself. Mrs. Clennam, with a deep contraction of her brows, was looking at him.

"Mr. Casby knows," said she, "that I am not subject to changes. The change that I await here is the great change."

"Indeed, ma'am?" returned Mr. Pancks, with a wandering eye towards the figure of the little seamstress on her knee picking threads and fraying of her work from the carpet. "You look nicely, ma'am."

"I bear what I have to bear," she answered. "Do you what you have to do."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mr. Pancks; "such is my endeavor."

"You are often in this direction, are you not?" asked Mrs. Clennam.

"Why yes, ma'am," said Pancks, "rather so lately; I have lately been round this way a good deal, owing to one thing and another."

"Beg Mr. Casby and his daughter not to trouble themselves, by deputy, about me. When they wish to see me, they know I am here to see them. They have no need to trouble themselves to send. You have no need to trouble yourself to come."

"Not the least trouble, ma'am," said Mr. Pancks. "You really are looking uncommonly nicely, ma'am."

"Thank you. Good evening."

The dismissal, and its accompanying finger pointed straight at the door, was so curt and direct that Mr. Pancks did not see his way to prolonging his visit. He stirred up his hair with his sprightliest expression, glanced at the little figure again, said "Good evening, ma'am; don't come down, Mrs. Affery; I know the road to the door," and steamed out. Mrs. Clennam, her chin resting on her hand, followed him with attentive and darkly distrustful eyes; and Affery stood looking at her, as if she were spellbound.

Slowly and thoughtfully, Mrs. Clennam's eyes turned from the door by which Pancks had gone out, to Little Dorrit, rising from the carpet. With her chin drooping more heavily on her hand, and her eyes vigilant and lowering, the sick woman sat looking at her until she attracted her attention. Little Dorrit colored under such a gaze, and looked down. Mrs. Clennam still sat intent.

"Little Dorrit," she said when she at last broke silence, "what do you know of that man?"

"I don't know anything of him, ma'am, except that I have seen him about, and that he has spoken to me."

"What has he said to you?"

"I don't understand what he has said, he is so strange. But nothing rough or disagreeable."

"Why does he come here to see you?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said Little Dorrit, with perfect frankness.

"You know that he does come here to see you?"

"I have fancied so," said Little Dorrit. "But why he should come here or anywhere, for that, ma'am, I can't think."

Mrs. Clennam cast her eyes towards the ground, and with her strong, set face, as intent upon a subject in her mind as it had lately been upon the form that seemed to pass out of her view, sat absorbed. Some minutes elapsed before she came out of this thoughtfulness, and resumed her hard composure.

Little Dorrit in the meanwhile had been waiting to go, but afraid to disturb her by moving. She now ventured to leave the spot where she had been standing since she had risen, and to pass gently round by the wheeled chair. She stopped at its side to say "Good night, ma'am."

Mrs. Clennam put out her hand, and laid it on her arm. Little Dorrit, confused under the touch, stood faltering. Perhaps some momentary recollection of the story of the Princess may have been in her mind.

"Tell me, Little Dorrit," said Mrs. Clennam. "Have you many friends now?"

"Very few, ma'am. Besides you, only Miss Flora and — one more."

"Meaning," said Mrs. Clennam, with her unbent finger again pointing to the door, "that man?"

"Oh no, ma'am!"

"Some friend of his, perhaps?"

"No, ma'am." Little Dorrit earnestly shook her head.

"Oh no! No one at all like him, or belonging to him."

"Well!" said Mrs. Clennam, almost smiling. "It is no affair of mine. I ask, because I take an interest in you; and because I believe I was your friend, when you had no other who could serve you. Is that so?"

"Yes, ma'am; indeed it is. I have been here many a time when, but for you and the work you gave me, we should have wanted everything."

"We," repeated Mrs. Clennam, looking towards the watch, once her dead husband's, which always lay upon her table. "Are there many of you?"

"Only father and I, now. I mean, only father and I to keep regularly out of what we get."

"Have you undergone many privations? You and your father, and who else there may be of you?" asked Mrs. Clennam, speaking deliberately, and meditatively turning the watch over and over."

"Sometimes it has been rather hard to live," said Little Dorrit, in her soft voice, and timid uncomplaining way; "but I think not harder — as to that — than many people find it."

"That's well said!" Mrs. Clennam quickly returned. "That's the truth! You are a good, thoughtful girl. You are a grateful girl too, or I much mistake you."

"It is only natural to be that. There is no merit in being that," said Little Dorrit. "I am indeed."

Mrs. Clennam, with a gentleness of which the dreaming Affery had never dreamed her to be capable, drew

down the face of her little seamstress, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Now go, Little Dorrit," said she, "or you will be late, poor child!"

In all the dreams Mistress Affery had been piling up since she first became devoted to the pursuit, she had dreamed nothing more astonishing than this. Her head ached with the idea that she would find the other clever one kissing Little Dorrit next, and then the two clever ones embracing each other and dissolving into tears of tenderness for all mankind. The idea quite stunned her, as she attended the light footsteps down the stairs, that the house-door might be safely shut.

On opening it to let Little Dorrit out, she found Mr. Pancks, instead of having gone his way, as in any less wonderful place and among less wonderful phenomena he might have been reasonably expected to do, fluttering up and down the court outside the house. The moment he saw Little Dorrit, he passed her briskly, said with his finger to his nose (as Mistress Affery distinctly heard), "Pancks the gypsy, fortune-telling," and went away. "Lord save us, here's a gypsy and a fortune-teller in it now!" cried Mistress Affery. "What next!"

She stood at the open door, staggering herself with this enigma, on a rainy, thundery evening. The clouds were flying fast, the wind was coming up in gusts, banging some neighboring shutters that had broken loose, twirling the rusty chimney-cowls and weathercocks, and rushing round and round a confined adjacent churchyard as if it had a mind to blow the dead citizens out of their graves. The low thunder, muttering in all quarters of the sky at once, seemed to threaten vengeance for this attempted desecration, and to mutter, "Let them rest! Let them rest!"

Mistress Affery, whose fear of thunder and lightning was only to be equalled by her dread of the haunted house with a premature and preternatural darkness in it, stood undecided whether to go in or not, until the question was settled for her by the door blowing upon her in a violent gust of wind and shutting her out. "What's to be done now, what's to be done now!" cried Mistress Affery, wringing her hands in this last uneasy dream of all; "when she's all alone by herself inside, and can no more come down to open it than the churchyard dead themselves!"

In this dilemma, Mistress Affery, with her apron as a hood to keep the rain off, ran crying up and down the solitary paved enclosure several times. Why she should then stoop down and look in at the keyhole of the door, as if an eye would open it, it would be difficult to say; but it is none the less what most people would have done in the same situation, and it is what she did.

From this posture she started up suddenly, with a half scream, feeling something on her shoulder. It was the touch of a hand; of a man's hand.

The man was dressed like a traveller, in a foraging cap with fur about it, and a heap of cloak. He looked like a foreigner. He had a quantity of hair and moustache — jet-black, except at the shaggy ends, where it had a tinge of red — and a high hook nose. He laughed at Mistress Affery's start and cry; and, as he laughed, his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

"What's the matter?" he asked in plain English. "What are you frightened at?"

"At you," panted Affery.

"Me, madam?"

"And the dismal evening, and — and everything," said Affery. "And here! The wind has been and blown the door to, and I can't get in."

"Hah!" said the gentleman, who took that very coolly. "Indeed! Do you know such a name as Clennam about here?"

"Lord bless us, I should think I did, I should think I did!" cried Affery, exasperated into a new wringing of hands by the inquiry.

"Where about here?"

"Where!" cried Affery, goaded into another inspection of the keyhole. "Where but here in this house? And she's all alone in her room, and lost the use of her limbs and can't stir to help herself or me, and the t'other clever one's out, and Lord forgive me!" cried Affery, driven into a frantic dance by these accumulated considerations, "if I a'n't a-going headlong out of my mind!"

Taking a warmer view of the matter now that it concerned himself, the gentleman stepped back to glance at the house, and his eyes soon rested on the long narrow window of the little room near the hall-door.

"Where may the lady be who has lost the use of her limbs, madam?" he inquired, with that peculiar smile which Mistress Affery could not choose but keep her eyes upon.

"Up there!" said Affery. "Them two windows."

"Hah! I am of a fair size, but could not have the honor of presenting myself in that room without a ladder. Now, madam, frankly — frankness is a part of my character — shall I open the door for you?"

"Yea, bless you, sir, for a dear creetur, and do it at once," cried Affery, "for she may be a calling to me at this very present minute, or may be setting herself a fire

and burning herself to death, or there's no knowing what may be happening to her, and me a-going out of my mind at thinking of it!"

"Stay, my good madam!" He restrained her impatience with a smooth white hand. "Business-hours, I apprehend, are over for the day?"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Affery. "Long ago."

"Let me make, then, a fair proposal. Fairness is a part of my character. I am just landed from the packet-boat, as you may see." He showed her that his cloak was very wet, and that his boots were saturated with water; she had previously observed that he was dishevelled and sallow, as if from a rough voyage, and so chilled that he could not keep his teeth from chattering. "I am just landed from the packet-boat, madam, and have been delayed by the weather; the infernal weather! In consequence of this, madam, some necessary business that I should otherwise have transacted here within the regular hours (necessary business because money-business), still remains to be done. Now, if you will fetch any authorized neighboring somebody to do it, in return for my opening the door, I'll open the door. If this arrangement should be objectionable, I'll—" and with the same smile he made a significant feint of backing away.

Mistress Affery, heartily glad to effect the proposed compromise, gave in her willing adhesion to it. The gentleman at once requested her to do him the favor of holding his cloak, took a short run at the narrow window, made a leap at the sill, clung his way up the bricks, and in a moment had his hand at the sash, raising it. His eyes looked so very sinister, as he put his leg into the room and glanced round at Mistress Affery, that she

thought, with a sudden coldness, if he were to go straight up-stairs to murder the invalid, what could she do to prevent him?

Happily he had no such purpose; for he reappeared, in a moment, at the house-door. "Now, my dear madam," he said, as he took back his cloak and threw it on, "if you'll have the goodness to — what the Devil's that!"

The strangest of sounds. Evidently close at hand from the peculiar shock it communicated to the air, yet subdued as if it were far off. A tremble, a rumble, and a fall of some light dry matter.

"What the Devil is it?"

"I don't know what it is, but I've heard the like of it over and over again," said Affery, who had caught his arm.

He could hardly be a very brave man, even she thought in her dreamy start and fright, for his trembling lips had turned colorless. After listening a few moments, he made light of it.

"Bah! Nothing! Now, my dear madam, I think you spoke of some clever personage. Will you be so good as to confront me with that genius?" He held the door in his hand, as though he were quite ready to shut her out again if she failed.

"Don't you say anything about the door and me, then," whispered Affery.

"Not a word."

"And don't you stir from here, or speak if she calls, while I run round the corner."

"Madam, I am a statue."

Affery had so vivid a fear of his going stealthily up-stairs the moment her back was turned, that, after hurry-

ing out of sight, she returned to the gateway to peep at him. Seeing him still on the threshold, more out of the house than in it, as if he had no love for darkness and no desire to probe its mysteries, she flew into the next street, and sent a message into the tavern to Mr. Flintwinch, who came out directly. The two returning together — the lady in advance, and Mr. Flintwinch coming up briskly behind, animated with the hope of shaking her before she could get housed — saw the gentleman standing in the same place in the dark, and heard the strong voice of Mrs. Clennam calling from her room, "Who is it? What is it? Why does no one answer? Who is that, down there?"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WORD OF A GENTLEMAN.

WHEN Mr. and Mrs. Flintwinch panted up to the door of the old house in the twilight, Jeremiah within a second of Affery, the stranger started back. "Death of my soul!" he exclaimed. "Why, how did you get here?"

Mr. Flintwinch, to whom these words were spoken, repaid the stranger's wonder in full. He gazed at him with blank astonishment; he looked over his own shoulder, as expecting to see some one he had not been aware of standing behind him; he gazed at the stranger again, speechlessly at a loss to know what he meant; he looked to his wife for explanation; receiving none, he pounced upon her, and shook her with such heartiness that he shook her cap off her head, saying between his teeth, with grim raillery, as he did it, "Affery, my woman, you must have a dose, my woman! This is some of your tricks! You have been dreaming again, mistress. What's it about? Who is it? What does it mean? Speak out or be choked! It's the only choice I'll give you."

Supposing Mistress Affery to have any power of election at the moment, her choice was decidedly to be choked; for she answered not a syllable to this adjuration, but, with her bare head wagging violently back-

wards and forwards, resigned herself to her punishment. The stranger, however, picking up her cap with an air of gallantry, interposed.

"Permit me," said he, laying his hand on the shoulder of Jeremiah, who stopped, and released his victim. "Thank you. Excuse me. Husband and wife I know, from this playfulness. Haha! Always agreeable to see that relation playfully maintained. Listen! May I suggest that somebody up-stairs, in the dark, is becoming energetically curious to know what is going on here?"

This reference to Mrs. Clennam's voice reminded Mr. Flintwinch to step into the hall and call up the staircase. "It's all right, I am here, Affery is coming with your light." Then he said to the latter flustered woman, who was putting her cap on, "Get out with you, and get up-stairs!" and then turned to the stranger, and said to him, "Now, sir, what might you please to want?"

"I am afraid," said the stranger, "I must be so troublesome as to propose a candle."

"True," assented Jeremiah. "I was going to do so. Please to stand where you are, while I get one."

The visitor was standing in the doorway, but turned a little into the gloom of the house as Mr. Flintwinch turned, and pursued him with his eyes into the little room, where he groped about for a phosphorus box. When he found it, it was damp, or otherwise out of order; and match after match that he struck into it lighted sufficiently to throw a dull glare about his groping face, and to sprinkle his hands with pale little spots of fire, but not sufficiently to light the candle. The stranger, taking advantage of this fitful illumination of

his visage, looked intently and wonderingly at him. Jeremiah, when he at last lighted the candle, knew he had been doing this, by seeing the last shade of a lowering watchfulness clear away from his face, as it broke into the doubtful smile that was a large ingredient in its expression.

"Be so good," said Jeremiah, closing the house door, and taking a pretty sharp survey of the smiling visitor in his turn, "as to step into my counting-house. — It's all right, I tell you!" petulantly breaking off to answer the voice up-stairs, still unsatisfied, though Affery was there, speaking in persuasive tones. "Don't I tell you it's all right? Preserve the woman, has she no reason at all in her!"

"Timorous," remarked the stranger.

"Timorous?" said Mr. Flintwinch, turning his head to retort, as he went before with the candle. "More courageous than ninety men in a hundred, sir, let me tell you."

"Though an invalid?"

"Many years an invalid. Mrs. Clennam. The only one of that name left in the House now. My partner."

Saying something apologetically as he crossed the hall, to the effect that at that time of night they were not in the habit of receiving any one, and were always shut up, Mr. Flintwinch led the way into his own office, which presented a sufficiently business-like appearance. Here he put the light on his desk, and said to the stranger, with his wryest twist upon him, "Your commands."

"My name is Blandois."

"Blandois. I don't know it," said Jeremiah.

"I thought it possible," resumed the other, "that you might have been advised from Paris —"

"We have had no advice from Paris, respecting anybody of the name of Blandois," said Jeremiah.

"No?"

"No."

Jeremiah stood in his favorite attitude. The smiling Mr. Blandois, opening his cloak to get his hand to a breast-pocket, paused to say, with a laugh in his glittering eyes, which it occurred to Mr. Flintwinch were too near together:

"You are so like a friend of mine! Not so identically the same as I supposed when I really did for the moment take you to be the same in the dusk — for which I ought to apologize; permit me to do so; a readiness to confess my errors is, I hope, a part of the frankness of my character — still, however, uncommonly like."

"Indeed?" said Jeremiah, perversely. "But I have not received any letter of advice from anywhere, respecting anybody of the name of Blandois."

"Just so," said the stranger.

"*Just so*," said Jeremiah.

Mr. Blandois, not at all put out by this omission on the part of the correspondents of the house of Clennam and Co., took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket, selected a letter from that receptacle, and handed it to Mr. Flintwinch. "No doubt you are well acquainted with the writing. Perhaps the letter speaks for itself, and requires no advice. You are a far more competent judge of such affairs than I am. It is my misfortune to be, not so much a man of business, as what the world calls (arbitrarily) a gentleman."

Mr. Flintwinch took the letter, and read, under date of Paris, "We have to present to you, on behalf of a highly esteemed correspondent of our Firm, M. Blandois,

of this city," &c. &c. "Such facilities as he may require and such attentions as may lie in your power," &c. &c. "Also have to add that if you will honor M. Blandois' drafts at sight to the extent of, say Fifty Pounds sterling (£50)," &c. &c.

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Flintwinch. "Take a chair. To the extent of anything that our House can do — we are in a retired, old-fashioned, steady way of business, sir — we shall be happy to render you our best assistance. I observe, from the date of this, that we could not yet be advised of it. Probably you came over with the delayed mail that brings the advice."

"That I came over with the delayed mail, sir," returned Mr. Blandois, passing his white hand down his high-hooked nose, "I know to the cost of my head and stomach: the detestable and intolerable weather having racked them both. You see me in the plight in which I came out of the Packet within this half hour. I ought to have been here hours ago, and then I should not have to apologize — permit me to apologize — for presenting myself so unseasonably, and frightening — no, by the by, you said not frightening; permit me to apologize again — the esteemed lady, Mrs. Clennam, in her invalid chamber above stairs."

Swagger, and an air of authorized condescension, do so much, that Mr. Flintwinch had already begun to think this a highly gentlemanly personage. Not the less unyielding with him on that account, he scraped his chin and said, what could he have the honor of doing for Mr. Blandois to-night, out of business hours?

"Faith!" returned that gentleman, shrugging his cloaked shoulders, "I must change, and eat and drink, and be lodged somewhere. Have the kindness to advise

me, a stranger, where, and money is a matter of perfect indifference, until to-morrow. The nearer the place, the better. Next door, if that's all."

Mr. Flintwinch was slowly beginning, "For a gentleman of your habits, there is not in this immediate neighborhood any hotel —" when Mr. Blandois took him up.

"So much for my habits! my dear sir," snapping his fingers. "A citizen of the world has no habits. That I am, in my poor way, a gentleman, by Heaven! I will not deny, but I have no unaccommodating prejudiced habits. A clean room, a hot dish for dinner, and a bottle of not absolutely poisonous wine, are all I want to-night. But I want that much, without the trouble of going one unnecessary inch to get it."

"There is," said Mr. Flintwinch, with more than his usual deliberation, as he met, for a moment, Mr. Blandois's shining eyes, which were restless; "there is a coffee-house and tavern close here, which, so far, I can recommend; but there's no style about it."

"I dispense with style!" said Mr. Blandois, waving his hand. "Do me the honor to show me the house, and introduce me there (if I am not too troublesome), and I shall be infinitely obliged."

Mr. Flintwinch, upon this, looked up his hat, and lighted Mr. Blandois across the hall again. As he put the candle on a bracket, where the dark old panelling almost served as an extinguisher for it, he bethought himself of going up to tell the invalid that he would not be absent five minutes.

"Oblige me," said the visitor, on his saying so, "by presenting my card of visit. Do me the favor to add, that I shall be happy to wait on Mrs. Clennam, to offer my personal compliments, and to apologize for having oc-

casioned any agitation in this tranquil corner, if it should suit her convenience to endure the presence of a stranger for a few minutes, after he shall have changed his wet clothes and fortified himself with something to eat and drink."

Jeremiah made all dispatch, and said, on his return, "She'll be glad to see you, sir; but, being conscious that her sick-room has no attractions, wishes me to say that she won't hold you to your offer, in case you should think better of it."

"To think better of it," returned the gallant Blandois, "would be to slight a lady; to slight a lady would be to be deficient in chivalry towards the sex; and chivalry towards the sex is a part of my character!" Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, and accompanied Mr. Flintwinch to the tavern; taking up on the road a porter, who was waiting with his portmanteau on the outer side of the gateway.

The house was kept in a homely manner, and the condescension of Mr. Blandois was infinite. It seemed to fill to inconvenience the little bar, in which the widow landlady and her two daughters received him; it was much too big for the narrow wainscoted room with a bagatelle-board in it, that was first proposed for his reception; it perfectly swamped the little private holiday sitting-room of the family, which was finally given up to him. Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger, and a massive show of watch-chain, Mr. Blandois waiting for his dinner, lolling on a window-seat with his knees drawn up, looked (for all the difference in the setting of the jewel) fearfully and wonderfully like a certain Monsieur Rigaud

who had once so waited for his breakfast, lying on the stone ledge of the iron grating of a cell in a villanous dungeon at Marseilles.

His greed at dinner, too, was closely in keeping with the greed of Monsieur Rigaud at breakfast. His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes, while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, flinging favorite cushions under his boots for a softer rest, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head, had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it. The softly moving hands that were so busy among the dishes had the old wicked facility of the hands that had clung to the bars. And when he could eat no more, and sat sucking his delicate fingers one by one and wiping them on a cloth, there wanted nothing but the substitution of vine-leaves to finish the picture.

On this man, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped by some similar process, Nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set the mark, Beware! It was not her fault, if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Mr. Blandois, having finished his repast and cleaned his fingers, took a cigar from his pocket, and, lying on the window-seat, again, smoked it out at his leisure, occasionally apostrophizing the smoke as it parted from his thin lips in a thin stream :

“Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my

little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois! At a pinch, an excellent master in English or French; a man for the bosom of families! You have a quick perception, you have humor, you have ease, you have insinuating manners, you have a good appearance; in effect, you are a gentleman! A gentleman you shall live, my small boy, and a gentleman you shall die. You shall win, however the game goes. They shall all confess your merit, Blandois. You shall subdue the society which has grievously wronged you, to your own high spirit. Death of my soul. You are high-spirited by right and by nature, my Blandois!"

To such soothing murmurs did this gentleman smoke out his cigar and drink out his bottle of wine. Both being finished, he shook himself into a sitting attitude; and with the concluding serious apostrophe, "Hold, then! Blandois, you ingenious one, have all your wits about you!" arose and went back to the house of Clennam and Co.

He was received at the door by Mistress Affery, who, under instructions from her lord, had lighted up two candles in the hall and a third on the staircase, and who conducted him to Mrs. Clennam's room. Tea was prepared there, and such little company arrangements had been made as usually attended the reception of expected visitors. They were slight on the greatest occasion, never extending beyond the production of the China tea-service, and the covering of the bed with a sober and sad drapery. For the rest, there was the bier-like sofa with the block upon it, and the figure in the widow's dress, as if attired for execution; the fire topped by the mound of damped ashes; the grate with its second little mound of ashes; the kettle, and the smell of black dye; all as they had been for fifteen years.

Mr. Flintwinch presented the gentleman commended to the consideration of Clennam and Co. Mrs. Clennam, who had the letter lying before her, bent her head and requested him to sit. They looked very closely at one another. That was but natural curiosity.

"I thank you, sir, for thinking of a disabled woman like me. Few who come here on business have any remembrance to bestow on one so removed from observation. It would be idle to expect that they should have. Out of sight, out of mind. When I am grateful for the exception, I don't complain of the rule.

Mr. Blandois, in his most gentlemanly manner, was afraid he had disturbed her by unhappily presenting himself at such an unconscionable time. For which he had already offered his best apologies to Mr. — he begged pardon — but by name had not the distinguished honor —

"Mr. Flintwinch has been connected with the House many years."

Mr. Blandois was Mr. Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant. He entreated Mr. Flintwinch to receive the assurance of his profoundest consideration.

"My husband being dead," said Mrs. Clennam, "and my son preferring another pursuit, our old House has no other representative in these days than Mr. Flintwinch."

"What do you call yourself?" was the surly demand of that gentleman. "You have the head of two men."

"My sex disqualifies me," she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eyes in Jeremiah's direction, "from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr. Flintwinch combines my interests with his own, and conducts it. It is not what it used to be; but some of our old friends (principally the writers of this letter) have the kindness not to forget us,

and we retain the power of doing what they intrust to us as efficiently as we ever did. This, however, is not interesting to you. You are English, sir?"

"Faith, madam, no; I am neither born nor bred in England. In effect, I am of no country," said Mr. Blandois, stretching out his leg and smiting it: "I descend from half a dozen countries."

"You have been much about the world?"

"It is true. By Heaven, madam, I have been here and there and everywhere!"

"You have no ties, probably. Are not married?"

"Madam," said Mr. Blandois, with an ugly fall of his eyebrows, "I adore your sex, but I am not married — never was."

Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him, pouring out the tea, happened in her dreamy state to look at him as he said these words, and to fancy that she caught an expression in his eyes which attracted her own eyes so that she could not get them away. The effect of this fancy was, to keep her staring at him with the teapot in her hand, not only to her own great uneasiness, but manifestly to his, too; and, through them both, to Mrs. Clennam's and Mr. Flintwinch's. Thus a few ghostly moments supervened, when they were all confusedly staring without knowing why.

"Affery," her mistress was the first to say, "what is the matter with you?"

"I don't know," said Mistress Affery, with her disengaged left hand extended towards the visitor. "It a'n't me. It's him!"

"What does this good woman mean?" cried Mr. Blandois, turning white, hot, and slowly rising with a look of such deadly wrath that it contrasted surprisingly

with the slight force of his words. "How is it possible to understand this good creature!"

"It's *not* possible," said Mr. Flintwinch, screwing himself rapidly in that direction. "She don't know what she means. She's an idiot, a wanderer in her mind. She shall have a dose, she shall have such a dose! Get along with you, my woman," he added in her ear, "get along with you, while you know your Affery, and before you're shaken to yeast."

Mistress Affery, sensible of the danger in which her identity stood, relinquished the teapot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished. The visitor gradually broke into a smile, and sat down again.

"You'll excuse her, Mr. Blandois," said Jeremiah, pouring out the tea himself; "she's failing and breaking up; that's what she's about. Do you take sugar, sir?"

"Thank you; no tea for me. — Pardon my observing it, but that's a very remarkable watch!"

The tea-table was drawn up near the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs. Clennam's own particular table. Mr. Blandois in his gallantry had risen to hand that lady her tea (her dish of toast was already there), and it was in placing the cup conveniently within her reach that the watch, lying before her as it always did, attracted his attention. Mrs. Clennam looked suddenly up at him.

"May I be permitted? Thank you. A fine old-fashioned watch," he said, taking it in his hand. "Heavy for use, but massive and genuine. I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself. Hah! A gentleman's watch with two cases in the old fashion. May I remove it from the outer case?"

Thank you. Ay? An old silk watch-lining, worked with beads! I have often seen these among old Dutch people and Belgians. Quaint things!"

"They are old-fashioned too," said Mrs. Clennam.

"Very. But this is not as old as the watch, I think?"

"I think not."

"Extraordinary how they used to complicate these cyphers!" remarked Mr. Blandois, glancing up with his own smile again. "Now, is this D. N. F.? It might be almost anything."

"Those are the letters."

Mr. Flintwinch, who had been observantly pausing all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so: always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp; and always deliberating again before he refilled it.

"D. N. F. was some tender, lovely, fascinating, fair creature, I make no doubt," observed Mr. Blandois, as he snapped on the case again. "I adore her memory on the assumption. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I adore but too readily. It may be a vice, it may be a virtue, but adoration of female beauty and merit constitutes three parts of my character, madam."

Mr. Flintwinch had by this time poured himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.

"You may be heart-free here, sir," she returned to Mr. Blandois. "Those letters are not intended, I believe, for the initials of any name."

"Of a motto perhaps," said Mr. Blandois, casually.

"Of a sentence. They have always stood, I believe, for Do Not Forget!"

"And naturally," said Mr. Blandois, replacing the

watch, and stepping backward to his former chair, "you do *not* forget."

Mr. Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp than he had taken yet, but made his succeeding pause under new circumstances: that is to say, with his head thrown back and his cup still held at his lips, while his eyes were still directed at the invalid. She had that force of face, and that concentrated air of collecting her firmness or obstinacy, which represented in her case what would have been gesture and action in another, as she replied with her deliberate strength of speech:

"No, sir, I do not forget. To lead a life as monotonous as mine has been during many years, is not the way to forget. To lead a life of self-correction is not the way to forget. To be sensible of having (as we all have, every one of us, all the children of Adam!) offences to expiate and peace to make, does not justify the desire to forget. Therefore I have long dismissed it, and I neither forget nor wish to forget."

Mr. Flintwinch, who had latterly been shaking the sediment at the bottom of his tea-cup, round and round, here gulped it down, and putting the cup in the tea-tray, as done with, turned his eyes upon Mr. Blandois, as if to ask him what he thought of that?

"All expressed, madam," said Mr. Blandois, with his smoothest bow and his white hand on his breast, "by the word 'naturally,' which I am proud to have had sufficient apprehension and appreciation (but without appreciation I could not be Blandois) to employ."

"Pardon me, sir," she returned, "if I doubt the likelihood of a gentleman of pleasure, and change, and politeness, accustomed to court and to be courted —"

"Oh madam! By Heaven!"

"— If I doubt the likelihood of such a character, quite comprehending what belongs to mine in my circumstances. Not to obtrude doctrine upon you," she looked at the rigid pile of hard pale books before her, "(for you go your own way, and the consequences are on your own head,) I will say this much: that I shape my course by pilots, strictly by proved and tried pilots, under whom I cannot be shipwrecked — cannot be — and that if I were unmindful of the admonition conveyed in those three letters, I should not be half as chastened as I am."

It was curious how she seized the occasion to argue with some invisible opponent. Perhaps with her own better sense, always turning upon herself and her own deception.

"If I forgot my ignorances in my life of health and freedom, I might complain of the life to which I am now condemned. I never do; I never have done. If I forgot that this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust, I might have some tenderness for its vanities. But I have no such tenderness. If I did not know that we are, every one, the subject (most justly the subject) of a wrath that must be satisfied, and against which mere actions are nothing, I might repine at the difference between me, imprisoned here, and the people who pass that gateway yonder. But I take it as a grace and favor to be elected to make the satisfaction I am making here, to know what I know for certain here, and to work out what I have worked out here. My affliction might otherwise have had no meaning to me. Hence I would forget, and I do

forget, nothing. Hence I am contented, and say it is better with me than with millions."

As she spoke these words, she put her hand upon the watch, and restored it to the precise spot on her little table which it always occupied. With her touch lingering upon it, she sat for some moments afterwards, looking at it steadily and half-defiantly.

Mr. Blandois, during this exposition, had been strictly attentive, keeping his eyes fastened on the lady, and thoughtfully stroking his moustache with his two hands. Mr. Flintwinch had been a little fidgety, and now struck in.

"There, there, there!" said he. "That is quite understood, Mrs. Clennam, and you have spoken piously and well. Mr. Blandois, I suspect, is not of a pious cast."

"On the contrary, sir!" that gentleman protested, snapping his fingers. "Your pardon! It's a part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr. Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!"

There was an inkling of suspicion in Mr. Flintwinch's face that he might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair (it was characteristic of this man, as it is of all men similarly marked, that whatever he did, he overdid, though it were sometimes by only a hair's-breadth), and approached to take his leave of Mrs. Clennam.

"With what will appear to you the egotism of a sick old woman, sir," she then said, "though really through your accidental allusion, I have been led away into the subject of myself and my infirmities. Being so considerate as to visit me, I hope you will be likewise so con-

siderate as to overlook that. Don't compliment me, if you please." For he was evidently going to do it. "Mr. Flintwinch will be happy to render you any service, and I hope your stay in this city may prove agreeable."

Mr. Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times. "This is an old room," he remarked, with a sudden sprightliness of manner, looking round when he got near the door. "I have been so interested that I have not observed it. But it's a genuine old room."

"It is a genuine old house," said Mrs. Clennam, with her frozen smile. "A place of no pretensions, but a piece of antiquity."

"Faith!" cried the visitor. "If Mr. Flintwinch would do me the favor to take me through the rooms on my way out, he could hardly oblige me more. An old house is a weakness with me. I have many weaknesses, but none greater. I love and study the picturesque in all its varieties. I have been called picturesque myself. It is no merit to be picturesque — I have greater merits, perhaps — but I may be, by an accident. Sympathy, sympathy!"

"I tell you beforehand, Mr. Blandois, that you'll find it very dingy, and very bare," said Jeremiah, taking up the candle. "It's not worth your looking at." But Mr. Blandois, smiting him in a friendly manner on the back, only laughed; so the said Blandois kissed his hand again to Mrs. Clennam, and they went out of the room together.

"You don't care to go up-stairs?" said Jeremiah, on the landing.

"On the contrary, Mr. Flintwinch; if not tiresome to you, I shall be ravished!"

Mr. Flintwinch, therefore, wormed himself up the staircase, and Mr. Blandois followed close. They ascended to the great garret bedroom, which Arthur had occupied on the night of his return. "There, Mr. Blandois!" said Jeremiah, showing it, "I hope you may think that worth coming so high, to see. I confess I don't."

Mr. Blandois being enraptured, they walked through other garrets and passages, and came down the staircase again. By this time, Mr. Flintwinch had remarked that he never found the visitor looking at any room, after throwing one quick glance around, but always found the visitor looking at him, Mr. Flintwinch. With this discovery in his thoughts, he turned about on the staircase for another experiment. He met his eyes directly; and on the instant of their fixing one another, the visitor, with that ugly play of nose and moustache, laughed (as he had done at every similar moment since they left Mrs. Clennam's chamber) a diabolically silent laugh.

As a much shorter man than the visitor, Mr. Flintwinch was at the physical disadvantage of being thus disagreeably leered at from a height; and as he went first down the staircase, and was usually a step or two lower than the other, this disadvantage was at the time increased. He postponed looking at Mr. Blandois again until this accidental inequality was removed by their having entered the late Mr. Clennam's room. But, then twisting himself suddenly round upon him, he found his look unchanged.

"A most admirable old house," smiled Mr. Blandois. "So mysterious. Do you never hear any haunted noises here?"

"Noises," returned Mr. Flintwinch. "No."

"Nor see any devils?"

"Not," said Mr. Flintwinch, grimly screwing himself at his questioner, "not any that introduce themselves under that name and in that capacity."

"Haha! A portrait here, I see."

(Still looking at Mr. Flintwinch, as if he were the portrait.)

"It's a portrait, sir, as you observe."

"May I ask the subject, Mr. Flintwinch?"

"Mr. Clennam, deceased. Her husband."

"Former owner of the remarkable watch, perhaps?" said the visitor.

Mr. Flintwinch, who had cast his eyes towards the portrait, twisted himself about again, and again found himself the subject of the same look and smile. "Yes, Mr. Blandois," he replied tartly. "It was his, and his uncle's before him, and Lord knows who before him; and that's all I can tell you of its pedigree."

"That's a strongly marked character, Mr. Flintwinch, our friend up-stairs."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremiah, twisting himself at the visitor again, as he did during the whole of this dialogue, like some screw-machine that fell short of its grip; for the other never changed, and he always felt obliged to retreat a little. "She is a remarkable woman. Great fortitude — great strength of mind."

"They must have been very happy," said Blandois.

"Who?" demanded Mr. Flintwinch, with another screw at him.

Mr. Blandois shook his right forefinger towards the sick-room, and his left forefinger towards the portrait, and then putting his arms akimbo, and striding his legs wide apart, stood smiling down at Mr. Flintwinch with the advancing nose and the retreating moustache.

"As happy as most other married people, I suppose," returned Mr. Flintwinch. "I can't say. I don't know. There are secrets in all families."

"Secrets!" cried Mr. Blandois, quickly. "Say it again, my son."

"I say," replied Mr. Flintwinch, upon whom he had swelled himself so suddenly that Mr. Flintwinch found his face almost brushed by the dilated chest. "I say there are secrets in all families."

"So there are," cried the other, clapping him on both shoulders, and rolling him backwards and forwards. "Haha! you are right. So there are! Secrets? Holy Blue! There are the devil's own secrets in some families, Mr. Flintwinch!" With that, after clapping Mr. Flintwinch on both shoulders several times, as if, in a friendly and humorous way, he were rallying him on a joke he had made, he threw up his arms, threw back his head, hooked his hands together behind it, and burst into a roar of laughter. It was in vain for Mr. Flintwinch to try another screw at him. He had his laugh out.

"But, favor me with the candle a moment," he said, when he had done. "Let us have a look at the husband of the remarkable lady. Hah!" holding up the light at arm's length. "A decided expression of face here too, though not of the same character. Looks as if he were saying — what is it — Do Not Forget — does he not, Mr. Flintwinch? By Heaven, sir, he does!"

As he returned him the candle, he looked at him once more; and then, leisurely strolling out with him into the hall, declared it to be a charming old house indeed, and one which had so greatly pleased him, that he would not have missed inspecting it for a hundred pounds.

Throughout these singular freedoms on the part of Mr. Blandois, which involved a general alteration in his demeanor, making it much coarser and rougher, much more violent and audacious, than before, Mr. Flintwinch, whose leathern face was not liable to many changes, preserved its immobility intact. Beyond now appearing, perhaps, to have been left hanging a trifle too long before that friendly operation of cutting down, he outwardly maintained an equable composure. They had brought their survey to a close in the little room at the side of the hall, and he stood there, eying Mr. Blandois.

"I am glad you are so well satisfied, sir," was his calm remark. "I didn't expect it. You seem to be quite in good spirits."

"In admirable spirits," returned Blandois. "Word of honor! never more refreshed in spirits. Do you ever have presentiments, Mr. Flintwinch?"

"I am not sure that I know what you mean by the term, sir," replied that gentleman.

"Say in this case, Mr. Flintwinch, undefined anticipations of pleasure to come."

"I can't say I am sensible of such a sensation at present," returned Mr. Flintwinch, with the utmost gravity. "If I should find it coming on, I'll mention it."

"Now I," said Blandois, "I, my son, have a presentiment to-night that we shall be well acquainted. Do you find it coming on?"

"N—no," returned Mr. Flintwinch, deliberately inquiring of himself. "I can't say I do."

"I have a strong presentiment that we shall become intimately acquainted. — You have no feeling of that sort yet?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Flintwinch.

Mr. Blandois, taking him by both shoulders again, rolled him about a little in his former merry way, then drew his arm through his own, and invited him to come off and drink a bottle of wine like a dear deep old dog as he was.

Without a moment's indecision, Mr. Flintwinch accepted the invitation, and they went out to the quarters where the traveller was lodged, through a heavy rain which had rattled on the windows, roofs, and pavements, ever since nightfall. The thunder and lightning had long ago passed over, but the rain was furious. On their arrival in Mr. Blandois's room, a bottle of port wine was ordered by that gallant gentleman; who (crushing every pretty thing he could collect, in the soft disposition of his dainty figure) coiled himself upon the window-seat, while Mr. Flintwinch took a chair opposite to him, with the table between them. Mr. Blandois proposed having the largest glasses in the house, to which Mr. Flintwinch assented. The bumpers filled, Mr. Blandois, with a roistering gayety, clinked the top of his glass against the bottom of Mr. Flintwinch's, and the bottom of his glass against the top of Mr. Flintwinch's, and drank to the intimate acquaintance he foresaw. Mr. Flintwinch gravely pledged him, and drank all the wine he could get, and said nothing. As often as Mr. Blandois clinked glasses (which was at every replenishment), Mr. Flintwinch stolidly did his part of the clinking, and would have stolidly done his companion's part of the wine as well as his own: being, except in the article of palate, a mere cask.

In short, Mr. Blandois found that to pour port wine into the reticent Flintwinch was, not to open him but to

shut him up. Moreover, he had the appearance of a perfect ability to go on all night ; or, if occasion were, all next day, and all next night ; whereas Mr. Blandois soon grew indistinctly conscious of swaggering too fiercely and boastfully. He therefore terminated the entertainment at the end of the third bottle.

"You will draw upon us to-morrow, sir," said Mr. Flintwinch, with a business-like face at parting.

"My Cabbage," returned the other, taking him by the collar with both hands. "I'll draw upon you ; have no fear. Adieu, my Flintwinch. Receive at parting ;" here he gave him a southern embrace, and kissed him soundingly on both cheeks ; "the word of a gentleman ! By a thousand Thunders, you shall see me again !"

He did not present himself next day, though the letter of advice came duly to hand. Inquiring after him at night, Mr. Flintwinch found, with surprise, that he had paid his bill and gone back to the Continent by way of Calais. Nevertheless, Jeremiah scraped out of his cogitating face a lively conviction that Mr. Blandois would keep his word on this occasion, and would be seen again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SPIRIT.

ANYBODY may pass, any day, in the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis, some meagre, wrinkled, yellow old man (who might be supposed to have dropped from the stars, if there were any star in the Heavens dull enough to be suspected of casting off so feeble a spark), creeping along with a scared air, as though bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and bustle. This old man is always a little old man. If he were ever a big old man, he has shrunk into a little old man; if he were always a little old man, he has dwindled into a less old man. His coat is of a color, and cut, that never was the mode anywhere, at any period. Clearly, it was not made for him, or for any individual mortal. Some wholesale contractor measured Fate for five thousand coats of such quality, and Fate has lent this old coat to this old man, as one of a long unfinished line of many old men. It has always large dull metal buttons, similar to no other buttons. This old man wears a hat, a thumbed and napless and yet an obdurate hat, which has never adapted itself to the shape of his poor head. His coarse shirt and his coarse neckcloth have no more individuality than his coat and hat; they have the same character of not being his — of not being anybody's. Yet this old man wears these clothes with a certain unaccustomed air of

being dressed and elaborated for the public ways; as though he passed the greater part of his time in a night-cap and gown. And so, like the country mouse in the second year of a famine, come to see the town mouse, and timidly threading his way to the town-mouse's lodging through a city of cats, this old man passes in the streets.

Sometimes, on holidays towards evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light. Then the little old man is drunk. A very small measure will upset him; he may be bowled off his unsteady legs with a half-pint pot. Some pitying acquaintance — chance acquaintance very often — has warmed up his weakness with a treat of beer, and the consequence will be the lapse of a longer time than usual before he shall pass again. For, the little old man is going home to the Workhouse; and on his good behavior they do not let him out often (though methinks they might, considering the few years he has before him to go out in, under the sun); and on his bad behavior they shut him up closer than ever, in a grove of two score and nineteen more old men, every one of whom smells of all the others.

Mrs. Plornish's father, — a poor little reedy piping old gentleman, like a worn-out bird; who had been in what he called the music-binding business, and met with great misfortunes, and who had seldom been able to make his way, or to see it or to pay it, or to do anything at all with it but find it no thoroughfare, — had retired of his own accord to the Workhouse which was appointed by law to be the Good Samaritan of his district (without the two-pence, which was bad political economy), on the settlement of that execution which had carried Mr.

Plornish to the Marshalsea College. Previous to his son-in-law's difficulties coming to that head, Old Nandy (he was always so called in his legal Retreat, but he was Old Mr. Nandy among the Bleeding Hearts) had sat in a corner of the Plornish fireside, and taken his bite and sup out of the Plornish cupboard. He still hoped to resume that domestic position, when Fortune should smile upon his son-in-law; in the mean time, while she preserved an immovable countenance, he was, and resolved to remain, one of these little old men in a grove of little old men with a community of flavor.

But, no poverty in him, and no coat on him that never was the mode, and no Old Men's Ward for his dwelling-place, could quench his daughter's admiration. Mrs. Plornish was as proud of her father's talents as she could possibly have been if they had made him Lord Chancellor. She had as firm a belief in the sweetness and propriety of his manners as she could possibly have had if he had been Lord Chamberlain. The poor little old man knew some pale and vapid little songs, long out of date, about Chloe, and Phyllis, and Strephon being wounded by the son of Venus; and for Mrs. Plornish there was no such music at the Opera, as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties, like a weak, little, broken barrel-organ, ground by a baby. On his "days out," those flecks of light in his flat vista of pollard old men, it was at once Mrs. Plornish's delight and sorrow, when he was strong with meat, and had taken his full half-penny-worth of porter, to say, "Sing us a song, Father." Then would he give them Chloe, and if he were in pretty good spirits, Phyllis also — Strephon he had hardly been up to, since he went into retirement — and

then would Mrs. Plornish declare she did believe there never was such a singer as Father, and wipe her eyes.

If he had come from Court on these occasions, nay, if he had been the noble Refrigerator come home triumphantly from a foreign court to be presented and promoted on his last tremendous failure, Mrs. Plornish could not have handed him with greater elevation about Bleeding Heart Yard. "Here's Father," she would say, presenting him to a neighbor. "Father will soon be home with us for good, now. A'n't Father looking well? Father's a sweeter singer than ever; you'd never have forgotten it, if you'd aheard him just now." As to Mr. Plornish, he had married these articles of belief in marrying Mr. Nandy's daughter, and only wondered how it was that so gifted an old gentleman had not made a fortune. This he attributed, after much reflection, to his musical genius not having been scientifically developed in his youth. "For why," argued Mr. Plornish, "why go a binding music when you've got it in yourself? That's where it is, I consider."

Old Nandy had a patron: one patron. He had a patron who in a certain sumptuous way — an apologetic way, as if he constantly took an admiring audience to witness that he really could not help being more free with this old fellow than they might have expected, on account of his simplicity and poverty — was mightily good to him. Old Nandy had been several times to the Marshalsea College, communicating with his son-in-law during his short durance there; and had happily acquired to himself, and had by degress and in course of time much improved the patronage of the Father of that national institution.

Mr. Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man,

as if the old man held of him in vassalage under some feudal tenure. He made little treats and teas for him, as if he came in with his homage from some outlying district, where the tenantry were in a primitive state. It seemed as if there were moments when he could by no means have sworn but that the old man was an ancient retainer of his, who had been meritoriously faithful. When he mentioned him, he spoke of him casually as his old pensioner. He had a wonderful satisfaction in seeing him, and in commenting on his decayed condition after he was gone. It appeared to him amazing that he could hold up his head at all, poor creature. "In the Workhouse, sir, the Union; no privacy, no visitors, no station, no respect, no speciality. Most deplorable!"

It was old Nandy's birthday, and they let him out. He said nothing about its being his birthday, or they might have kept him in; for such old men should not be born. He passed along the streets as usual to Bleeding Heart Yard, and had his dinner with his daughter and son-in-law, and gave them Phyllis. He had hardly concluded, when Little Dorrit looked in to see how they all were.

"Miss Dorrit," said Mrs. Plornish. "Here's Father! A'n't he looking nice? And such voice he's in!"

Little Dorrit gave him her hand, and smilingly said she had not seen him this long time.

"No, they're rather hard on poor Father," said Mrs. Plornish, with a lengthening face, "and don't let him have half as much change and fresh air as would benefit him. But he'll soon be home for good, now. Won't you, Father?"

"Yes, my dear, I hope so. In good time, please God."

Here Mr. Plornish delivered himself of an oration which he invariably made, word for word, the same, on all such opportunities. It was couched in the following terms :

"John Edward Nandy. Sir. While there's a ounce of wittles or drink of any sort in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. While there's a handful of fire or a mouthful of bed in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. If so be as there should be nothing in this present roof, you should be as welcome to your share on it as if it was something much or little. And this is what I mean and so I don't deceive you, and consequently which is to stand out is to entreat of you, and therefore why not do it?"

To this lucid address, which Mr. Plornish always delivered as if he had composed it (as no doubt he had) with enormous labor, Mrs. Plornish's father pipingly replied :

"I thank you kindly, Thomas, and I know your intentions well, which is the same I thank you kindly for. But no, Thomas. Until such times as it's not to take it out of your children's mouths, which take it is, and call it by what name you will it do remain and equally deprive though may they come and too soon they can not come, no, Thomas, no!"

Mrs. Plornish, who had been turning her face a little away with a corner of her apron in her hand, brought herself back to the conversation again, by telling Miss Dorrit that Father was going over the water to pay his respects, unless she knew of any reason why it might not be agreeable.

Her answer was, "I am going straight home, and if he will come with me I shall be so glad to take care of

him — so glad," said Little Dorrit, always thoughtful of the feelings of the weak, "of his company."

"There, Father!" cried Mrs. Plornish. "A'n't you a gay young man to be going for a walk along with Miss Dorrit! Let me tie your neck-handkerchief into a regular good bow, for you're a regular beau yourself, Father, if ever there was one."

With this filial joke his daughter smartened him up, and gave him a loving hug, and stood at the door with her weak child in her arms and her strong child tumbling down the steps, looking after her little old father as he toddled away with his arm under Little Dorrit's.

They walked at a slow pace, and Little Dorrit took him by the Iron Bridge and sat him down there for a rest, and they looked over at the water and talked about the shipping, and the old man mentioned what he would do if he had a ship full of gold coming home to him (his plan was to take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Gardens, and live there all the rest of their lives, attended on by the waiter), and it was a special birthday for the old man. They were within five minutes of their destination, when, at the corner of her own street, they came upon Fanny in her new bonnet bound for the same port.

"Why, good gracious me, Amy!" cried that young lady starting. "You never mean it!"

"Mean what, Fanny dear?"

"Well! I could have believed a great deal of you," returned the young lady with burning indignation, "but I don't think even I could have believed this, of even you!"

"Fanny!" cried Little Dorrit, wounded and astonished.

"Oh! Don't Fanny me, you mean little thing, don't! The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!" (firing off the last word as if it were a ball from an air-gun.)

"O Fanny!"

"I tell you not to Fanny me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us, on all occasions, is really infamous. You bad little thing!"

"Does it disgrace anybody," said Little Dorrit, very gently, "to take care of this poor old man?"

"Yes, miss," returned her sister, "and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does. And you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You'll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way unmolested."

With this, she bounced across to the opposite pavement. The old disgrace, who had been deferentially bowing a pace or two off (for Little Dorrit had let his arm go in her wonder, when Fanny began), and who had been hustled and cursed by impatient passengers for stopping the way, rejoined his companion, rather giddy, and said, "I hope nothing's wrong with your honored father, Miss? I hope there's nothing the matter in the honored family?"

"No, no," returned Little Dorrit. "No, thank you. Give me your arm again, Mr. Nandy. We shall soon be there now."

So, she talked to him as she had talked before, and they came to the Lodge and found Mr. Chivery on the

lock, and went in. Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea was sauntering towards the Lodge at the moment when they were coming out of it, entering the Prison arm in arm. As the spectacle of their approach met his view, he displayed the utmost agitation and despondency of mind ; and — altogether regardless of old Nandy, who, making his reverence, stood with his hat in his hand, as he always did in that gracious presence — turned about, and hurried in at his own doorway and up the staircase.

Leaving the old unfortunate, whom in an evil hour she had taken under her protection, with a hurried promise to return to him directly, Little Dorrit hastened after her father, and, on the staircase, found Fanny following her, and flouncing up with offended dignity. The three came into the room almost together ; and the Father sat down in his chair, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan.

“ Of course,” said Fanny. “ Very proper. Poor, afflicted Pa ! Now, I hope you believe me, Miss ! ”

“ What is it, father ? ” cried Little Dorrit, bending over him. “ Have I made you unhappy, father ? Not I, I hope ! ”

“ You hope, indeed ! I dare say ! Oh, you ” — Fanny paused for a sufficiently strong expression — “ you Common-minded little Amy ! You complete prison-child ! ”

He stopped these angry reproaches with a wave of his hand, and sobbed out, raising his face, and shaking his melancholy head at his younger daughter, “ Amy, I know that you are innocent in intention. But you have cut me to the soul.”

“ Innocent in intention ! ” the implacable Fanny struck

in. "Stuff in intention! Low in intention! Lowering of the family in intention!"

"Father!" cried Little Dorrit, pale and trembling, "I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. Tell me how it is, that I may not do it again!"

"How it is, you prevaricating little piece of goods!" cried Fanny. "You know how it is. I have told you already, so don't fly in the face of Providence by attempting to deny it!"

"Hush! Amy," said the father, passing his pocket-handkerchief several times across his face, and then grasping it convulsively in the hand that dropped across his knee, "I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here. I may have succeeded; I may not. You may know it; you may not. I give no opinion. I have endured everything here but humiliation. That I have happily been spared — until this day."

Here his convulsive grasp unclosed itself, and he put his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes again. Little Dorrit, on the ground beside him, with her imploring hand upon his arm, watched him remorsefully. Coming out of his fit of grief, he clenched his pocket-handkerchief once more.

"Humiliation I have happily been spared until this day. Through all my troubles there has been that — Spirit in myself, and that — that submission to it, if I may use the term, in those about me, which has spared me — ha — humiliation. But this day, this minute, I have keenly felt it."

"Of course! How could it be otherwise!" exclaimed the irrepressible Fanny. "Careering and prancing about with a Pauper!" (air-gun again.)

"But, dear father," cried Little Dorrit, "I don't justify myself for having wounded your dear heart — no! Heaven knows I don't!" She clasped her hands in quite an agony of distress. "I do nothing but beg and pray you to be comforted and overlook it. But if I had not known that you were kind to the old man yourself, and took much notice of him, and were always glad to see him, I would not have come here with him, father, I would not indeed. What I have been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!" said Little Dorrit, her heart wellnigh broken, "for anything the world could give me, or anything it could take away."

Fanny, with a partly angry and partly repentant sob, began to cry herself, and to say — as this young lady always said when she was half in a passion and half out of it, half spiteful with herself and half spiteful with everybody else — that she wished she was dead.

The Father of the Marshalsea in the mean time took his younger daughter to his breast, and patted her head.

"There, there! Say no more, Amy, say no more, my child. I will forget it as soon as I can. I," with hysterical cheerfulness, "I — shall soon be able to dismiss it. It is perfectly true, my dear, that I *am* always glad to see my old pensioner — as such, as such — and that I do — ha — extend as much protection and kindness to the — hum — the bruised reed — I trust I may so call him without impropriety — as in my circumstances, I can. It is quite true that this is the case, my dear child. At the same time, I preserve in doing this, if I may — ha — if I may use the expression — Spirit. Becoming Spirit. And there are some things which are," he stopped to sob,

"irreconcilable with that, and wound that — wound it deeply. It is not that I have seen my good Amy attentive, and — ha — condescending to my old pensioner — it is not that that hurts me. It is, if I am to close the painful subject by being explicit, that I have seen my child, my own child, my own daughter, coming into this College out of the public streets — smiling! smiling! — arm in arm with — O my God, a livery!"

This reference to the coat of no cut and no time, the unfortunate gentleman gasped forth, in a scarcely audible voice, and with his clenched pocket-handkerchief raised in the air. His excited feelings might have found some further painful utterance, but for a knock at the door, which had been already twice repeated, and to which Fanny (still wishing herself dead, and indeed now going so far as to add, buried) cried "Come in!"

"Ah, Young John!" said the Father, in an altered and calmed voice. "What is it, Young John?"

"A letter for you, sir, being left in the Lodge just this minute, and a message with it, I thought, happening to be there myself, sir, I would bring it to your room." The speaker's attention was much distracted by the piteous spectacle of Little Dorrit at her father's feet, with her head turned away.

"Indeed, John? Thank you."

"The letter is from Mr. Clennam, sir — it's the answer — and the message was, sir, that Mr. Clennam also sent his compliments, and word that he would do himself the pleasure of calling this afternoon, hoping to see you, and likewise," attention more distracted than before, "Miss Amy."

"Oh!" As the Father glanced into the letter (there was a bank-note in it), he reddened a little, and patted

Amy on the head afresh. "Thank you, Young John. Quite right. Much obliged to you for your attention. No one waiting?"

"No, sir, no one waiting."

"Thank you, John. How is your mother, Young John?"

"Thank you, sir, she's not quite as well as we could wish — in fact, we none of us are, except father — but she's pretty well, sir."

"Say we sent our remembrances, will you? Say, kind remembrances, if you please, Young John."

"Thank you, sir, I will." And Mr. Chivery, junior, went his way, having spontaneously composed on the spot an entirely new epitaph for himself, to the effect that Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, Having at such a date, Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of his inconsolable parents, And terminated his existence, By his own rash act.

"There, there, Amy!" said the Father, when Young John had closed the door, "let us say no more about it." The last few minutes had improved his spirits remarkably, and he was quite lightsome. "Where is my old pensioner all this while? We must not leave him by himself any longer, or he will begin to suppose he is not welcome, and that would pain me. Will you fetch him, my child, or shall I?"

"If you wouldn't mind, father," said Little Dorrit, trying to bring her sobbing to a close.

"Certainly I will go, my dear. I forgot; your eyes are rather. There! Cheer up, Amy. Don't be uneasy about me. I am quite myself, again, my love, quite

myself. Go to your room, Amy, and make your face look comfortable and pleasant to receive Mr. Clennam."

"I would rather stay in my own room, Father," returned Little Dorrit, finding it more difficult than before to regain her composure. "I would far rather not see Mr. Clennam."

"Oh, fie, fie, my dear, that's folly. Mr. Clennam is a very gentlemanly man — very gentlemanly. A little reserved at times; but I will say extremely gentlemanly. I couldn't think of your not being here to receive Mr. Clennam, my dear, especially this afternoon. So go and freshen yourself up, Amy; go and freshen yourself up, like a good girl."

Thus directed, Little Dorrit dutifully rose and obeyed: only pausing for a moment as she went out of the room, to give her sister a kiss of reconciliation. Upon which, that young lady, feeling much harassed in her mind, and having for the time worn out the wish with which she generally relieved it, conceived and executed the brilliant idea of wishing old Nandy dead, rather than that he should come bothering there like a disgusting, tiresome, wicked wretch, and making mischief between two sisters.

The Father of the Marshalsea, even humming a tune, and wearing his black velvet cap a little on one side, so much improved were his spirits, went down into the yard, and found his old pensioner standing hat in hand just within the gate, as he had stood all this time. "Come, Nandy!" said he, with great suavity. "Come up-stairs, Nandy; you know the way; why don't you come up-stairs?" He went the length, on this occasion, of giving him his hand, and saying, "How are you, Nandy? Are you pretty well?" To which that vocalist

returned, "I thank you, honored sir, I am all the better for seeing your honor." As they went along the Yard, the Father of the Marshalsea presented him to a Collegian of recent date. "An old acquaintance of mine, sir, an old pensioner." And then said, "Be covered, my good Nandy; put your hat on," with great consideration.

His patronage did not stop here; for he charged Maggy to get the tea ready, and instructed her to buy certain tea-cakes, fresh butter, eggs, cold ham, and shrimps: to purchase which collation, he gave her a bank-note for ten pounds, laying strict injunctions on her to be careful of the change. These preparations were in an advanced stage of progress, and his daughter Amy had come back with her work, when Clennam presented himself. Whom he most graciously received, and besought to join their meal.

"Amy, my love, you know Mr. Clennam even better than I have the happiness of doing. Fanny, my dear, you are acquainted with Mr. Clennam." Fanny acknowledged him haughtily; the position she tacitly took up in all such cases being that there was a vast conspiracy to insult the family by not understanding it, or sufficiently deferring to it, and here was one of the conspirators. "This, Mr. Clennam, you must know, is an old pensioner of mine, old Nandy, a very faithful old man." (He always spoke of him as an object of great antiquity, but he was two or three years younger than himself.) "Let me see. You know Plornish, I think? I think my daughter Amy has mentioned to me that you know poor Plornish?"

"Oh yes!" said Arthur Clennam.

"Well, sir, this is Mrs. Plornish's father."

"Indeed? I am glad to see him."

"You would be more glad if you knew his many good qualities, Mr. Clennam."

"I hope I shall come to know them, through knowing him," said Arthur, secretly pitying the bowed and submissive figure.

"It is a holiday with him, and he comes to see his old friends who are always glad to see him," observed the Father of the Marshalsea. Then he added behind his hand, "Union, poor old fellow. Out for the day."

By this time Maggy, quietly assisted by her Little Mother, had spread the board, and the repast was ready. It being hot weather and the prison very close, the window was as wide open as it could be pushed. "If Maggy will spread that newspaper on the window-sill, my dear," remarked the Father complacently and in a half whisper to Little Dorrit, "my old pensioner can have his tea there, while we are having ours."

So, with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure, Mrs. Plornish's father was handsomely regaled. Clennam had never seen anything like his magnanimous protection by that other Father, he of the Marshalsea; and was lost in the contemplation of its many wonders.

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings. As if he were a gracious Keeper, making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited.

"Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth," he explained to the company, "are going, poor old boy.")

At another time, he said, "No shrimps, Nandy?" and on his not instantly replying, observed, ("His hear-

ing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.")

At another time, he asked him, "Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?"

"No, sir; no. I haven't any great liking for that."

"No, to be sure," he assented. "Very natural." Then he privately informed the circle, ("Legs going.")

Once, he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was?

"John Edward," said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. "How old, sir? Let me think now."

The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead. ("Memory weak.")

"John Edward, sir? Well, I really forget. I couldn't say, at this minute, sir, whether it's two and two months, or whether it's two and five months. It's one or the other."

"Don't distress yourself by worrying your mind about it," he returned, with infinite forbearance. ("Faculties evidently decaying — old man rusts in the life he leads!")

The more of these discoveries that he persuaded himself he made in the pensioner, the better he appeared to like him; and when he got out of his chair after tea, to bid the pensioner good-by, on his intimating that he feared, honored sir, his time was running out, he made himself look as erect and strong as possible.

"We don't call this a shilling, Nandy, you know," he said, putting one in his hand. "We call it tobacco."

"Honored sir, I thank you. It shall buy tobacco. My thanks and duty to Miss Amy and Miss Fanny. I wish you good-night, Mr. Clennam."

"And mind you don't forget us, you know, Nandy," said the Father. "You must come again, mind, whenever you have an afternoon. You must not come out without seeing us, or we shall be jealous. Good night, Nandy. Be very careful how you descend the stairs, Nandy; they are rather uneven and worn." With that he stood on the landing, watching the old man down; and when he came into the room again, said, with a solemn satisfaction on him, "A melancholy sight that, Mr. Clennam, though one has the consolation of knowing that he doesn't feel it himself. The poor old fellow is a dismal wreck. Spirit broken and gone — pulverized — crushed out of him, sir, completely!"

As Clennam had a purpose in remaining, he said what he could responsive to these sentiments, and stood at the window with their enunciator, while Maggy and her Little Mother washed the tea-service and cleared it away. He noticed that his companion stood at the window with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign, and that, when any of his people in the yard below looked up, his recognition of their salutes just stopped short of a blessing.

When Little Dorrit had her work on the table, and Maggy hers on the bedstead, Fanny fell to tying her bonnet as a preliminary to her departure. Arthur, still having his purpose, still remained. At this time the door opened, without any notice, and Mr. Tip came in. He kissed Amy as she started up to meet him, nodded to Fanny, nodded to his father, gloomed on the visitor without further recognition, and sat down.

"Tip, dear," said Little Dorrit mildly, shocked by this, "don't you see —"

"Yes, I see, Amy. If you refer to the presence of any visitor you have here — I say, if you refer to that," answered Tip, jerking his head with emphasis towards his shoulder nearest Clennam, "I see!"

"Is that all you say?"

"That's all I say. And I suppose," added the lofty young man, after a moment's pause, "the visitor will understand me, when I say that's all I say. In short, I suppose the visitor will understand, that he hasn't used me like a gentleman."

"I do not understand that," observed the obnoxious personage referred to, with tranquillity.

"No? Why, then, to make it clearer to you, sir, I beg to let you know, that when I address what I call a properly-worded appeal, and an urgent appeal, and a delicate appeal, to an individual, for a small temporary accommodation, easily within his power — easily within his power, mind! — and when that individual writes back word to me that he begs to be excused, I consider that he doesn't treat me like a gentleman."

The Father of the Marshalsea, who had surveyed his son in silence, no sooner heard this sentiment, than he began, in an angry voice:

"How dare you —" But his son stopped him.

"Now, don't ask me how I dare, father, because that's bosh. As to the fact of the line of conduct I choose to adopt towards the individual present, you ought to be proud of my showing a proper spirit."

"I should think so!" cried Fanny.

"A proper spirit?" said the Father. "Yes, a proper spirit; a becoming spirit. Is it come to this that my son teaches me — *me* — spirit!"

"Now, don't let us bother about it, father, or have any row on the subject. I have fully made up my mind that the individual present has not treated me like a gentleman. And there's an end of it."

"But there is not an end of it, sir," returned the Father. "But there shall not be an end of it. You have made up your mind? You have made up your mind?"

"Yes, *I* have. What's the good of keeping on like that?"

"Because," returned the Father, in a great heat, "you had no right to make up your mind to what is monstrous, to what is — ha — immoral, to what is — hum — parricidal. No, Mr. Clennam, I beg, sir. Don't ask me to desist; there is a — hum — a general principle involved here, which rises even above considerations of — ha — hospitality. I object to the assertion made by my son. I — ha — I personally repel it."

"Why, what is it to you, father?" returned the son, over his shoulder.

"What is it to me, sir? I have a — hum — a spirit, sir, that will not endure it. I," he took out his pocket-handkerchief again and dabbed his face. "I am outraged and insulted by it. Let me suppose the case that I myself may at a certain time — ha — or times, have made a — hum — an appeal, and a properly-worded appeal, and a delicate appeal, and an urgent appeal, to some individual for a small temporary accommodation. Let me suppose that that accommodation could have been easily extended, and was not extended, and that that individual informed me that he begged to be excused. Am I to be told by my own son, that I therefore received treatment not due to a gentleman, and that I — ha — I submitted to it?"

His daughter Amy gently tried to calm him, but he would not on any account be calmed. He said his spirit was up, and wouldn't endure this.

Was he to be told that, he wished to know again, by his own son, on his own hearth, to his own face? Was that humiliation to be put upon him by his own blood?

"You are putting it on yourself, father, and getting into all this injury of your own accord," said the young gentleman morosely. "What I have made up my mind about, has nothing to do with you. What I said, had nothing to do with you. Why need you go trying on other people's hats?"

"I reply it has everything to do with me," returned the Father. "I point out to you, sir, with indignation, that — hum — the — ha — delicacy and peculiarity of your father's position should strike you dumb, sir, if nothing else should, in laying down such — ha — such unnatural principles. Besides; if you are not filial, sir, if you discard that duty, are you at least — hum — not a Christian? Are you — ha — an Atheist? And is it Christian, let me ask you, to stigmatize and denounce an individual for begging to be excused this time, when the same individual may — ha — respond with the required accommodation next time? Is it the part of a Christian not to — hum — not to try him again?" He had worked himself into quite a religious glow and fervor.

"I see precious well," said Mr. Tip, rising, "that I shall get no sensible or fair argument here to-night, and so the best thing I can do is to cut. Good night, Amy. Don't be vexed. I am very sorry it happens here, and you here, upon my soul I am; but I can't altogether part with my spirit, even for your sake, old girl."

With those words he put on his hat and went out,

accompanied by Miss Fanny; who did not consider it spirited on her part to take leave of Clennam with any less opposing demonstration than a stare, importing that she had always known him for one of the large body of conspirators.

When they were gone, the Father of the Marshalsea was at first inclined to sink into despondency again, and would have done so, but that a gentleman opportunely came up within a minute or two to attend him to the Snuggery. It was the gentleman Clennam had seen on the night of his own accidental detention there, who had that impalpable grievance about the misappropriated Fund on which the Marshal was supposed to batten. He presented himself as a deputation to escort the Father to the Chair; it being an occasion on which he had promised to preside over the assembled Collegians, in the enjoyment of a little Harmony.

"Such, you see, Mr. Clennam," said the Father, "are the incongruities of my position here. But a public duty! No man, I am sure, would more readily recognize a public duty than yourself."

Clennam besought him not to delay a moment.

"Amy, my dear, if you can persuade Mr. Clennam to stay longer, I can leave the honors of our poor apology for an establishment, with confidence in your hands, and perhaps you may do something towards erasing from Mr. Clennam's mind the — ha — untoward and unpleasant circumstance which has occurred since tea-time."

Clennam assured him that it had made no impression on his mind, and therefore required no erasure.

"My dear sir," said the Father, with a removal of his black cap and a grasp of Clennam's hand, combining to

express the safe receipt of his note and enclosure that afternoon, "Heaven ever bless you!"

So, at last, Clennam's purpose in remaining was attained, and he could speak to Little Dorrit with nobody by. Maggy counted as nobody, and she was by.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE FORTUNE-TELLING.

MAGGY sat at her work in her great white cap, with its quantity of opaque frilling hiding what profile she had (she had none to spare), and her serviceable eye brought to bear upon her occupation, on the window side of the room. What with her flapping cap, and what with her unserviceable eye, she was quite partitioned off from her Little Mother, whose seat was opposite the window. The tread and shuffle of feet on the pavement of the yard had much diminished since the taking of the Chair; the tide of Collegians having set strongly in the direction of Harmony. Some few who had no music in their souls, or no money in their pockets, dawdled about; and the old spectacle of the visitor-wife and the depressed unseasoned prisoner still lingered in corners, as broken cobwebs and such unsightly discomforts drizzle in corners of other places. It was the quietest time the College knew, saving the night-hours when the Collegians took the benefit of the act of sleep. The occasional rattle of applause upon the tables of the Snuggery, denoted the successful termination of a morsel of Harmony; or the responsive acceptance, by the united children, of some toast or sentiment offered to them by their Father. Occasionally, a vocal strain more sonorous than the generality informed the listener that some boastful bass

was in blue water, or in the hunting-field, or with the rein-deer, or on the mountain, or among the heather ; but the Marshal of the Marshalsea knew better, and had got him hard and fast.

As Arthur Clennam moved to sit down by the side of Little Dorrit, she trembled so that she had much ado to hold her needle. Clennam gently put his hand upon her work, and said, " Dear Little Dorrit, let me lay it down."

She yielded it to him, and he put it aside. Her hands were then nervously clasping together, but he took one of them.

" How seldom I have seen you lately, Little Dorrit ! "

" I have been busy, sir."

" But I heard only to-day," said Clennam, " by mere accident, of your having been with those good people close by me. Why not come to me, then ? "

" I — I don't know. Or rather, I thought you might be busy too. You generally are now, are you not ? "

He saw her trembling little form and her downcast face, and the eyes that drooped the moment they were raised to his — he saw them almost with as much concern as tenderness.

" My child, your manner is so changed ! "

The trembling was now quite beyond her control. Softly withdrawing her hand, and laying it in her other hand, she sat before him with her head bent, and her whole form trembling.

" My own Little Dorrit," said Clennam, compassionately.

She burst into tears. Maggy looked round of a sudden, and stared for at least a minute ; but did not inter-

pose. Clennam waited some little while before he spoke again.

"I cannot bear," he said then, "to see you weep ; but I hope this is a relief to an overcharged heart."

"Yes it is, sir. Nothing but that."

"Well, well ! I feared you would think too much of what passed here just now. It is of no moment ; not the least. I am only unfortunate to have come in the way. Let it go by with these tears. It is not worth one of them. One of them ? Such an idle thing should be repeated, with my glad consent, fifty times a day, to save you a moment's heart-ache, Little Dorrit."

She had taken courage now, and answered, far more in her usual manner, "You are so good ! But even if there was nothing else in it to be sorry for and ashamed of, it is such a bad return to you —"

"Hush !" said Clennam, smiling and touching her lips with his hand. "Forgetfulness in you, who remember so many and so much, would be new indeed. Shall I remind you that I am not, and that I never was, anything but the friend whom you agreed to trust ? No. You remember it, don't you ?"

"I try to do so, or I should have broken the promise just now, when my mistaken brother was here. You will consider his bringing-up in this place, and will not judge him hardly, poor fellow, I know !" In raising her eyes with these words, she observed his face more nearly than she had done yet, and said, with a quick change of tone, "You have not been ill, Mr. Clennam ?"

"No."

"Nor tried ? Nor hurt ?" she asked him, anxiously.

It fell to Clennam, now, to be not quite certain how to answer. He said in reply :

"To speak the truth, I have been a little troubled, but it is over. Do I show it so plainly? I ought to have more fortitude and self-command than that. I thought I had. I must learn them of you. Who could teach me better!"

He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers.

"But it brings me to something that I wish to say," he continued, "and therefore I will not quarrel even with my own face for telling tales and being unfaithful to me. Besides, it is a privilege and pleasure to confide in my Little Dorrit. Let me confess then, that, forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such things had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, without marking it — that, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one."

"Do I know her, sir?" asked Little Dorrit.

"No, my child."

"Not the lady who has been kind to me for your sake?"

"Flora. No, no. Did you think —"

"I never quite thought so," said Little Dorrit, more to herself than him. "I did wonder at it a little."

"Well!" said Clennam, abiding by the feeling that had fallen on him in the avenue on the night of the roses, the feeling that he was an older man, who had done with that tender part of life, "I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a little — in short, a good deal — and got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years, and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked for-

ward, and found that I should soon be gray. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly."

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart, in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her.

"I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me, or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again."

O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!

"All that is over, and I have turned my face from it. Why do I speak of this to Little Dorrit? Why do I show you, my child, the space of years that there is between us, and recall to you that I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you?"

"Because you trust me, I hope. Because you know that nothing can touch you, without touching me; that nothing can make you happy or unhappy, but it must make me, who am so grateful to you, the same."

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, "I love him!" and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail-home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him.

"For those reasons assuredly, Little Dorrit, but for another too. So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and adviser. I mean, I am the more easily to be trusted; and any little constraint that you might feel with another, may vanish before me. Why have you kept so retired from me? Tell me."

"I am better here. My place and use are here. I am much better here," said Little Dorrit, faintly.

"So you said that day, upon the bridge. I thought of it much afterwards. Have you no secret you could intrust to me, with hope and comfort, if you would?"

"Secret? No, I have no secret," said Little Dorrit in some trouble.

They had been speaking in low voices; more because it was natural to what they said, to adopt that tone, than with any care to reserve it from Maggy at her work. All of a sudden Maggy stared again, and this time spoke:

"I say! Little Mother!"

"Yes, Maggy."

"If you a'n't got no secret of your own to tell him, tell him that about the Princess. *She* had a secret, you know."

"The Princess had a secret?" said Clennam, in some surprise. "What Princess was that, Maggy?"

"Lor! How you do go and bother a gal of ten," said Maggy, "catching the poor thing up in that way. Whoever said the Princess had a secret? *I* never said so."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you did."

"No, I didn't. How could I, when it was her as wanted to find it out? It was the little woman as had the secret, and she was always a spinning at her wheel. And so she says to her, why do you keep it there? And

so, the t'other one says to her, no I don't; and so, the t'other one says to her, yes, you do; and then they both goes to the cupboard, and there it is. And she wouldn't go into the Hospital, and so she died. You know, Little Mother; Tell him that. For it was a reg'lar good secret, that was!" cried Maggy, hugging herself.

Arthur looked at Little Dorrit for help to comprehend this, and was struck by seeing her so timid and red. But, when she told him it was only a Fairy Tale she had one day made up for Maggy, and that there was nothing in it which she wouldn't be ashamed to tell again to anybody else, even if she could remember it, he left the subject where it was.

However, he returned to his own subject, by first entreating her to see him oftener, and to remember that it was impossible to have a stronger interest in her welfare than he had, or to be more set upon promoting it than he was. When she answered fervently, she well knew that, she never forgot it, he touched upon his second and more delicate point — the suspicion he had formed.

"Little Dorrit," he said, taking her hand again, and speaking lower than he had spoken yet, so that even Maggy in the small room could not hear him, "another word. I have wanted very much to say this to you; I have tried for opportunities. Don't mind me, who, for the matter of years, might be your father or your uncle. Always think of me as quite an old man. I know that all your devotion centres in this room, and that nothing to the last will ever tempt you away from the duties you discharge here. If I were not sure of it, I should, before now, have implored you, and implored your father, to let me make some provision for you in a more suitable place. But, you may have an interest — I will not say,

now, though even that might be — may have, at another time, an interest in some one else ; an interest not incompatible with your affection here."

She was very, very pale, and silently shook her head.

"It may be, dear Little Dorrit."

"No. No. No." She shook her head, after each slow repetition of the word, with an air of quiet desolation that he remembered long afterwards. The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls ; within that very room.

"But, if it ever should be, tell me so, my dear child. Intrust the truth to me, point out the object of such an interest to me, and I will try with all the zeal, and honor, and friendship and respect that I feel for you, good Little Dorrit of my heart, to do you a lasting service."

"O thank you, thank you ! But, O no, O no, O no !" She said this, looking at him with her work-worn hands folded together, and in the same resigned accents as before.

"I press for no confidence now. I only ask you to repose unhesitating trust in me."

"Can I do less than that, when you are so good !"

"Then you will trust me fully ? Will have no secret unhappiness, or anxiety, concealed from me ?"

"Almost none."

"And you have none now ?"

She shook her head. But she was very pale.

"When I lie down to-night, and my thoughts come back — as they will, for they do every night, even when I have not seen you — to this sad place, I may believe that there is no grief beyond this room, now, and its usual occupants, which preys on Little Dorrit's mind ?"

She seemed to catch at these words — that he remembered, too, long afterwards — and said, more brightly, "Yes, Mr. Clennam ; yes, you may !"

The crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, as if a little steam-engine with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room. As it approached, which it did very rapidly, it labored with increased energy; and, after knocking at the door, it sounded as if it were stooping down and snorting in at the keyhole.

Before Maggy could open the door, Mr. Pancks, opening it from without, stood without a hat and with his bare head in the wildest condition, looking at Clennam and Little Dorrit, over her shoulder. He had a lighted cigar in his hand, and brought with him airs of ale and tobacco smoke.

"Pancks the gypsy," he observed, out of breath, "fortune-telling."

He stood dingly smiling, and breathing hard at them, with a most curious air. As if, instead of being his proprietor's grubber, he were the triumphant proprietor of the Marshalsea, the Marshal, all the turnkeys, and all the Collegians. In his great self-satisfaction he put his cigar to his lips (being evidently no smoker), and took such a pull at it, with his right eye shut up tight for the purpose, that he underwent a convulsion of shuddering and choking. But even in the midst of that paroxysm, he still essayed to repeat his favorite introduction of himself "Pa-ancks the gi-ipsy, fortune-telling."

"I am spending the evening with the rest of 'em," said Pancks. "I've been singing. I've been taking a part in White sand and gray sand. I don't know anything about it. Never mind. I'll take any part in anything. It's all the same, if you're loud enough."

At first Clennam supposed him to be intoxicated. But, he soon perceived that though he might be a little the worse (or better) for ale, the staple of his excitement was not brewed from malt, or distilled from any grain or berry.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dorrit?" said Pancks. "I thought you wouldn't mind my running round, and looking in for a moment. Mr. Clennam I heard was here, from Mr. Dorrit. How are you, sir?"

Clennam thanked him, and said he was glad to see him so gay.

"Gay!" said Pancks. "I'm in wonderful feather, sir. I can't stop a minute, or I shall be missed, and I don't want 'em to miss me. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

He seemed to have an insatiate delight in appealing to her, and looking at her; excitedly sticking his hair up at the same moment, like a dark species of cockatoo.

"I haven't been here half an hour. I knew Mr. Dorrit was in the chair, and I said, 'I'll go and support him!' I ought to be down in Bleeding Heart Yard by rights; but I can worry them to-morrow. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

His little black eyes sparkled electrically. His very hair seemed to sparkle, as he roughened it. He was in that highly-charged state that one might have expected to draw sparks and snaps from him by presenting a knuckle to any part of his figure.

"Capital company here," said Pancks. — "Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

She was half afraid of him, and irresolute what to say. He laughed, with a nod towards Clennam.

"Don't mind him, Miss Dorrit. He's one of us. We agreed that you shouldn't take on to mind me before

people, but we didn't mean Mr. Clennam. He's one of us. He's in it. A'n't you, Mr. Clennam? — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

The excitement of this strange creature was fast communicating itself to Clennam. Little Dorrit with amazement, saw this, and observed that they exchanged quick looks.

"I was making a remark," said Pancks, "but I declare I forget what it was. Oh, I know! Capital company here. I've been treating 'em all round. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

"Very generous of you," she returned, noticing another of the quick looks between the two.

"Not at all," said Pancks. "Don't mention it. I'm coming into my property, that's the fact. I can afford to be liberal. I think I'll give 'em a treat here. Tables laid in the yard. Bread in stacks. Pipes in fagots. Tobacco in hayloads. Roast beef and plum pudding for every one. Quart of double stout a head. Pint of wine too, if they like it, and the authorities give permission. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

She was thrown into such a confusion by his manner, or rather by Clennam's growing understanding of his manner (for she looked to him after every fresh appeal and cockatoo demonstration on the part of Mr. Pancks), that she only moved her lips in answer, without forming any word.

"And oh, by the by!" said Pancks. "You were to live to know what was behind us on that little hand of yours. And so you shall, you shall, my darling. — Eh, Miss Dorrit?"

He had suddenly checked himself. Where he got all the additional black prongs from, that now flew up all

over his head, like the myriads of points that break out in the large change of a great firework, was a wonderful mystery.

"But I shall be missed;" he came back to that; "and I don't want 'em to miss me. Mr. Clennam, you and I made a bargain. I said you should find me stick to it. You shall find me stick to it now, sir, if you'll step out of the room a moment. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good-night. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good fortune."

He rapidly shook her by both hands, and puffed down stairs. Arthur followed him with such a hurried step, that he had very nearly tumbled over him on the last landing, and rolled him down into the yard.

"What is it, for Heaven's sake!" Arthur demanded, when they burst out there both together.

"Stop a moment, sir. Mr. Rugg. Let me introduce him."

With those words he presented another man without a hat, and also with a cigar, and also surrounded with a halo of ale and tobacco smoke, which man, though not so excited as himself, was in a state which would have been akin to lunacy but for its fading into sober method when compared with the rampancy of Mr. Pancks.

"Mr. Clennam, Mr. Rugg," said Pancks. "Stop a moment. Come to the pump."

They adjourned to the pump. Mr. Pancks, instantly putting his head under the spout, requested Mr. Rugg to take a good strong turn at the handle. Mr. Rugg complying to the letter, Mr. Pancks came forth snorting and blowing to some purpose, and dried himself on his handkerchief.

"I am the clearer for that," he gasped to Clennam standing astonished. "But, upon my soul, to hear her

father making speeches in that chair, knowing what we know, and to see her up in that room in that dress, knowing what we know, is enough to — give me a back, Mr. Rugg — a little higher, sir, — that'll do ! ”

Then and there, on that Marshalsea pavement, in the shades of evening, did Mr. Pancks, of all mankind, fly over the head and shoulders of Mr. Rugg of Pentonville, General Agent, Accountant, and Recoverer of Debts. Alighting on his feet, he took Clennam by the button-hole, led him behind the pump, and pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

Mr. Rugg, also, pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

“ Stay ! ” said Clennam, in a whisper. “ You have made a discovery.”

Mr. Pancks answered, with an unction which there is no language to convey, “ We rather think so.”

“ Does it implicate any one ? ”

“ How implicate, sir ? ”

“ In any suppression, or wrong dealing of any kind ? ”

“ Not a bit of it.”

“ Thank God ! ” said Clennam to himself. “ Now show me.”

“ You are to understand ” — snorted Pancks, feverishly unfolding papers, and speaking in short high-pressure blasts of sentences, “ Where's the Pedigree ? Where's Schedule number four, Mr. Rugg ? Oh ! all right ! Here we are. — You are to understand that we are this very day virtually complete. We sha'n't be legally for a day or two. Call it at the outside a week. We've been at it, night and day, for I don't know how long. Mr. Rugg, you know how long ? Never mind. Don't

say. You'll only confuse me. You shall tell her, Mr. Clennam. Not till we give you leave. Where's that rough total, Mr. Rugg? Oh! Here we are! There, sir! That's what you'll have to break to her. That man's your Father of the Marshalsea!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. MERDLE'S COMPLAINT.

RESIGNING herself to inevitable fate, by making the best of those people the Miggleses, and submitting her philosophy to the draught upon it, of which she had foreseen the likelihood in her interview with Arthur, Mrs. Gowan handsomely resolved not to oppose her son's marriage. In her progress to, and happy arrival at, this resolution, she was possibly influenced, not only by her maternal affections, but by three politic considerations.

Of these, the first may have been, that her son had never signified the smallest intention to ask her consent, or any mistrust of his ability to dispense with it; the second, that the pension bestowed upon her by a grateful country (and a Barnacle) would be freed from any little filial inroads, when her Henry should be married to the darling only child of a man in very easy circumstances; the third, that Henry's debts must clearly be paid down upon the altar-railing by his father-in-law. When, to these threefold points of prudence, there is added the fact that Mrs. Gowan yielded her consent the moment she knew of Mr. Meagles having yielded his, and that Mr. Meagles's objection to the marriage had been the sole obstacle in its way all along, it becomes the height of probability that the relict of the deceased

Commissioner of nothing particular turned these ideas in her sagacious mind.

Among her connections and acquaintances, however, she maintained her individual dignity, and the dignity of the blood of the Barnacles, by diligently nursing the pretence that it was a most unfortunate business; that she was sadly cut up by it; that this was a perfect fascination, under which Henry labored; that she had opposed it for a long time, but what could a mother do; and the like. She had already called Arthur Clennam to bear witness to this fable, as a friend of the Meagles family; and she followed up the move by now impounding the family itself for the same purpose. In the first interview she accorded to Mr. Meagles, she slid herself into the position of disconsolately but gracefully yielding to irresistible pressure. With the utmost politeness and good-breeding, she feigned that it was she — not he — who had made the difficulty, and who at length gave way; and that the sacrifice was hers — not his. The same feint, with the same polite dexterity, she foisted on Mrs. Meagles, as a conjurer might have forced a card on that innocent lady; and, when her future daughter-in-law was presented to her by her son, she said, on embracing her, "My dear, what have you done to Henry that has bewitched him so!" at the same time allowing a few tears to carry before them, in little pills, the cosmetic powder on her nose; as a delicate but touching signal that she suffered much inwardly, for the show of composure with which she bore her misfortune.

Among the friends of Mrs. Gowan (who piqued herself at once on being Society, and on maintaining intimate and easy relations with that Power), Mrs. Merdle

occupied a front row. True, the Hampton Court Bohemians, without exception, turned up their noses at Merdle as an upstart ; but they turned them down again, by falling flat on their faces to worship his wealth. In which compensating adjustment of their noses, they were pretty much like Treasury, Bar, and Bishop, and all the rest of them.

To Mrs. Merdle, Mrs. Gowan repaired on a visit of self-condolence, after having given the gracious consent aforesaid. She drove into town for the purpose, in a one-horse carriage, irreverently called at that period of English history, a pill-box. It belonged to a job-master in a small way, who drove it himself, and who jobbed it by the day, or hour, to most of the old ladies, in Hampton Court Palace ; but it was a point of ceremony, in that encampment, that the whole equipage should be tacitly regarded as the private property of the jobber for the time being, and that the job-master should betray personal knowledge of nobody but the jobber in possession. So, the Circumlocution Barnacles, who were the largest job-masters in the universe, always pretended to know of no other job but the job immediately in hand.

Mrs. Merdle was at home, and was in her nest of crimson and gold, with the parrot on a neighboring stem watching her with his head on one side, as if he took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species. To whom entered Mrs. Gowan, with her favorite green fan, which softened the light on the spots of bloom.

"My dear soul," said Mrs. Gowan, tapping the back of her friend's hand with this fan, after a little indifferent conversation, "you are my only comfort. That affair of Henry's that I told you of, is to take place. Now,

how does it strike you? I am dying to know, because you represent and express Society so well."

Mrs. Merdle reviewed the bosom which Society was accustomed to review; and having ascertained that show-window of Mr. Merdle's and the London jewellers to be in good order, replied:

"As to marriage on the part of a man, my dear, Society requires that he should retrieve his fortunes by marriage. Society requires that he should gain by marriage. Society requires that he should found a handsome establishment by marriage. Society does not see, otherwise, what he has to do with marriage. Bird, be quiet!"

For, the parrot on his cage above them, presiding over the conference as if he were a Judge (and indeed he looked rather like one), had wound up the exposition with a shriek.

"Cases there are," said Mrs. Merdle, delicately crooking the little finger of her favorite hand, and making her remarks neater by that neat action; "cases there are where a man is not young or elegant, and is rich, and has a handsome establishment already. Those are of a different kind. In such cases —"

Mrs. Merdle shrugged her snowy shoulders and put her hand upon the jewel-stand, checking a little cough, as though to add, "why a man looks out for this sort of thing, my dear." Then the parrot shrieked again, and she put up her glass to look at him, and said, "Bird! Do be quiet!"

"But, young men," resumed Mrs. Merdle, "and by young men you know what I mean, my love — I mean people's sons who have the world before them — they must place themselves in a better position towards So-

ciety by marriage, or Society really will not have any patience with their making fools of themselves. Dreadfully worldly all this sounds," said Mrs. Merdle, leaning back in her nest and putting up her glass again, "does it not?"

"But it is true," said Mrs. Gowan, with a highly moral air.

"My dear, it is not to be disputed for a moment," returned Mrs. Merdle; "because Society has made up its mind on the subject, and there is nothing more to be said. If we were in a more primitive state, if we lived under roofs of leaves, and kept cows and sheep and creatures, instead of banker's accounts (which would be delicious; my dear, I am pastoral to a degree, by nature), well and good. But we don't live under leaves, and keep cows and sheep and creatures. I perfectly exhaust myself sometimes, in pointing out the distinction to Edmund Sparkler."

Mrs. Gowan, looking over her green fan when this young gentleman's name was mentioned, replied as follows:

"My love, you know the wretched state of the country — those unfortunate concessions of John Barnacle's! — and you therefore know the reasons for my being as poor as Thingummy."

"A Church-mouse?" Mrs. Merdle suggested with a smile.

"I was thinking of the other proverbial Church person — Job," said Mrs. Gowan. "Either will do. It would be idle to disguise, consequently, that there is a wide difference between the position of your son and mine. I may add, too, that Henry has talent —"

"Which Edmund certainly has not," said Mrs. Merdle, with the greatest *snavily*.

— “and that his talent, combined with disappointment,” Mrs. Gowan went on, “has led him into a pursuit which — ah dear me! *You* know, my dear. Such being Henry’s different position, the question is what is the most inferior class of marriage to which I can reconcile myself.”

Mrs. Merdle was so much engaged with the contemplation of her arms (beautiful-formed arms, and the very thing for bracelets), that she omitted to reply for a while. Roused at length by the silence, she folded the arms, and with admirable presence of mind looked her friend full in the face, and said interrogatively “Ye-es? And then?”

“And then, my dear,” said Mrs. Gowan not quite so sweetly as before, “I should be glad to hear what you have to say to it.”

Here the parrot, who had been standing on one leg since he screamed last, burst into a fit of laughter, bobbed himself derisively up and down on both legs, and finished by standing on one leg again, and pausing for a reply, with his head as much awry as he could possibly twist it.

“Sounds mercenary, to ask what a gentleman is to get with the lady,” said Mrs. Merdle; “but Society *is* perhaps a little mercenary you know, my dear.”

“From what I can make out,” said Mrs. Gowan, “I believe I may say that Henry will be relieved from debt —”

“Much in debt?” asked Mrs. Merdle, through her eye-glass.

“Why tolerably, I should think,” said Mrs. Gowan.

“Meaning the usual thing; I understand; just so,” Mrs. Merdle observed in a comfortable sort of way.

“And that the father will make them an allowance of

three hundred a-year, or perhaps altogether something more. Which, in Italy — ”

“ Oh ! Going to Italy ? ” said Mrs. Merdle.

“ For Henry to study. You need be at no loss to guess why, my dear. That dreadful Art — ”

True. Mrs. Merdle hastened to spare the feelings of her afflicted friend. She understood. Say no more !

“ And that,” said Mrs. Gowan, shaking her despondent head, “ that’s all. That,” repeated Mrs. Gowan, furling her green fan for the moment and tapping her chin with it (it was on the way to being a double chin ; might be called a chin and a half at present), “ that’s all ! On the death of the old people, I suppose there will be more to come ; but how it may be restricted or locked up, I don’t know. And as to that, they may live forever. My dear, they are just the kind of people to do it.”

Now, Mrs. Merdle, who really knew her friend Society pretty well, and who knew what Society’s mothers were, and what Society’s daughters were, and what Society’s matrimonial market was, and how prices ruled in it, and what scheming and counter-scheming took place for the high buyers, and what bargaining and huckstering went on, thought in the depths of her capacious bosom that this was a sufficiently good catch. Knowing, however, what was expected of her, and perceiving the exact nature of the fiction to be nursed, she took it delicately in her arms, and put her required contribution of gloss upon it.

“ And that is all, my dear ? ” said she, heaving a friendly sigh. “ Well, well ! the fault is not yours. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. You must exercise the strength of mind for which you are renowned, and make the best of it.”

"The girl's family have made," said Mrs. Gowan, "of course, the most strenuous endeavors to — as the lawyers say — to have and to hold Henry."

"Of course they have, my dear," said Mrs. Merdle.

"I have persisted in every possible objection, and have worried myself morning, noon, and night, for means to detach Henry from the connection."

"No doubt you have, my dear," said Mrs. Merdle.

"And all of no use. All has broken down beneath me. Now tell me, my love. Am I justified in at last yielding my most reluctant consent to Henry's marrying among people not in Society; or, have I acted with inexcusable weakness?"

In answer to this direct appeal, Mrs. Merdle assured Mrs. Gowan (speaking as a Priestess of Society) that she was highly to be commended, that she was much to be sympathized with, that she had taken the highest of parts, and had come out of the furnace refined. And Mrs. Gowan, who of course saw through her own threadbare blind perfectly, and who knew that Mrs. Merdle saw through it perfectly, and who knew that Society would see through it perfectly, came out of this form, notwithstanding, as she had gone into it, with immense complacency and gravity.

The conference was held at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when all the region of Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was resonant of carriage-wheels and double-knocks. It had reached this point when Mr. Merdle came home, from his daily occupation of causing the British name to be more and more respected in all parts of the civilized globe, capable of the appreciation of world-wide commercial enterprise and gigantic combinations of skill and capital. For, though nobody knew

with the least precision what Mr. Merdle's business was, except that it was to coin money, these were the terms in which everybody defined it on all ceremonious occasions, and which it was the last new polite reading of the parable of the camel and the needle's eye to accept without inquiry.

For a gentleman who had this splendid work cut out for him, Mr. Merdle looked a little common, and rather as if, in the course of his vast transactions, he had accidentally made an interchange of heads with some inferior spirit. He presented himself before the two ladies, in the course of a dismal stroll through his mansion, which had no apparent object but escape from the presence of the chief butler.

"I beg your pardon," he said, stopping short in confusion; "I didn't know there was anybody here but the parrot."

However, as Mrs. Merdle said "You can come in!" and as Mrs. Gowan said she was just going, and had already risen to take her leave, he came in, and stood looking out at a distant window, with his hands crossed under his uneasy coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody. In this attitude he fell directly into a reverie, from which he was only aroused by his wife's calling to him from her ottoman, when they had been for some quarter of an hour alone.

"Eh? Yes?" said Mr. Merdle, turning towards her. "What is it?"

"What is it?" repeated Mrs. Merdle. "It is, I suppose, that you have not heard a word of my complaint."

"Your complaint, Mrs. Merdle?" said Mr. Merdle. "I didn't know that you were suffering from a complaint. What complaint?"

"A complaint of you," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Oh! A complaint of me," said Mr. Merdle. "What is the — what have I — what may you have to complain of in me, Mrs. Merdle?"

In his withdrawing, abstracted, pondering way, it took him some time to shape this question. As a kind of faint attempt to convince himself that he was the master of the house, he concluded by presenting his forefinger to the parrot, who expressed his opinion on that subject by instantly driving his bill into it.

"You were saying, Mrs. Merdle," said Mr. Merdle, with his wounded finger in his mouth, "that you had a complaint against me?"

"A complaint which I could scarcely show the justice of more emphatically, than by having to repeat it," said Mrs. Merdle. "I might as well have stated it to the wall. I had far better have stated it to the bird. He would at least have screamed."

"You don't want me to scream, Mrs. Merdle, I suppose," said Mr. Merdle, taking a chair.

"Indeed I don't know," retorted Mrs. Merdle, "but that you had better do that, than be so moody and distraught. One would at least know that you were sensible of what was going on around you."

"A man might scream, and yet not be that, Mrs. Merdle," said Mr. Merdle, heavily.

"And might be dogged, as you are at present, without screaming," returned Mrs. Merdle. "That's very true. If you wish to know the complaint I make against you, it is, in so many plain words, that you really ought not to go into Society, unless you can accommodate yourself to Society."

Mr. Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he

had upon his head that he seemed to lift himself up by it as he started out of his chair, cried :

"Why, in the name of *all* the infernal powers, Mrs. Merdle, who does more for Society than I do? Do you see these premises, Mrs. Merdle? Do you see this furniture, Mrs. Merdle? Do you look in the glass and see yourself, Mrs. Merdle? Do you know the cost of all this, and who it's all provided for? And yet will you tell me that I oughtn't to go into Society? I, who shower money upon it in this way? I, who might be almost said — to — to — to harness myself to a watering-cart full of money, and go about, saturating Society, every day of my life?"

"Pray don't be violent, Mr. Merdle," said Mrs. Merdle.

"Violent?" said Mr. Merdle. "You are enough to make me desperate. You don't know half of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it."

"I know," returned Mrs. Merdle, "that you receive the best in the land. I know that you move in the whole Society of the country. And I believe I know (indeed, not to make any ridiculous pretence about it, I know I know) who sustains you in it, Mr. Merdle."

"Mrs. Merdle," retorted that gentleman, wiping his dull red and yellow face. "I know that, as well as you do. If you were not an ornament to Society, and if I was not a benefactor to Society, you and I would never have come together. When I say a benefactor to it, I mean a person who provides it with all sorts of expensive things to eat and drink and look at. But, to tell me that I am not fit for it after all I have done for it — after all I have done for it," repeated Mr. Merdle, with a wild

emphasis that made his wife lift up her eyelids, "after all — all! — to tell me I have no right to mix with it after all, is a pretty reward."

"I say," answered Mrs. Merdle composedly, "that you ought to make yourself fit for it by being more *degagé*, and less preoccupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do."

"How do I carry them about, Mrs. Merdle?" asked Mr. Merdle.

"How do you carry them about?" said Mrs. Merdle. "Look at yourself in the glass."

Mr. Merdle involuntarily turned his eyes in the direction of the nearest mirror, and asked, with a slow determination of his turbid blood to his temples, whether a man was to be called to account for his digestion?

"You have a physician," said Mrs. Merdle.

"He does me no good," said Mr. Merdle.

Mrs. Merdle changed her ground.

"Besides," said she, "your digestion is nonsense. I don't speak of your digestion. I speak of your manner."

"Mrs. Merdle," returned her husband, "I look to you for that. You supply manner, and I supply money."

"I don't expect you," said Mrs. Merdle, reposing easily among her cushions, "to captivate people. I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothing — or to seem to care about nothing — as everybody else does."

"Do I ever say I care about anything?" asked Mr. Merdle.

"Say? No! Nobody would attend to you if you did. But you show it."

"Show what? What do I show?" demanded Mr. Merdle hurriedly.

"I have already told you. You show that you carry your business cares and projects about, instead of leaving them in the City, or wherever else they belong to," said Mrs. Merdle. "Or seeming to. Seeming would be quite enough: I ask no more. Whereas you couldn't be more occupied with your day's calculations and combinations than you habitually show yourself to be, if you were a carpenter."

"A carpenter!" repeated Mr. Merdle, checking something like a groan. "I shouldn't so much mind being a carpenter, Mrs. Merdle."

"And my complaint is," pursued the lady, disregarding the low remark, "that it is not the tone of Society, and that you ought to correct it, Mr. Merdle. If you have any doubt of my judgment, ask even Edmund Sparkler." The door of the room had opened, and Mrs. Merdle now surveyed the head of her son through her glass. "Edmund; we want you here."

Mr. Sparkler, who had merely put in his head and looked round the room without entering (as if he were searching the house for that young lady with no nonsense about her), upon this followed up his head with his body, and stood before them. To whom, in a few easy words adapted to his capacity, Mrs. Merdle stated the question at issue.

The young gentleman, after anxiously feeling his shirt-collar as if it were his pulse and he were hypochondriacal, observed, "That he had heard it noticed by fellers."

"Edmund Sparkler has heard it noticed," said Mrs. Merdle, with languid triumph. "Why, no doubt every-

body has heard it noticed!" Which in truth was no unreasonable inference; seeing that Mr. Sparkler would probably be the last person, in any assemblage of the human species, to receive an impression from anything that passed in his presence.

"And Edmund Sparkler will tell you, I dare say," said Mrs. Merdle, waving her favorite hand towards her husband, "how he has heard it noticed."

"I couldn't," said Mr. Sparkler, after feeling his pulse as before, "couldn't undertake to say what led to it — 'cause memory desperate loose. But being in company with the brother of a doosed fine gal — well educated too — with no biggodd nonsense about her — at the period alluded to —"

"There! Never mind the sister," remarked Mrs. Merdle, a little impatiently. "What did the brother say?"

"Didn't say a word, ma'am," answered Mr. Sparkler. "As silent a feller as myself. Equally hard up for a remark."

"Somebody said something," returned Mrs. Merdle. "Never mind who it was."

("Assure you I don't in the least," said Mr. Sparkler.)

"But tell us what it was."

Mr. Sparkler referred to his pulse again, and put himself through some severe mental discipline before he replied:

"Fellers referring to my Governor — expression not my own — occasionally compliment my Governor in a very handsome way on being immensely rich and knowing — perfect phenomenon of Buyer and Banker and that — but say the Shop sits heavily on him. Say he carries the Shop about, on his back rather — like Jew clothesman with too much business."

"Which," said Mrs. Merdle, rising, with her floating drapery about her, "is exactly my complaint. Edmund, give me your arm up-stairs."

Mr. Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of himself to Society, looked out of nine windows in succession, and appeared to see nine wastes of space. When he had thus entertained himself, he went down-stairs, and looked intently at all the carpets on the ground-floor; and then came up-stairs again, and looked intently at all the carpets on the first floor; as if they were gloomy depths, in unison with his oppressed soul. Through all the rooms he wandered, as he always did, like the last person on earth who had any business to approach them. Let Mrs. Merdle announce, with all her might, that she was at Home ever so many nights in a season, she could not announce more widely and unmistakably than Mr. Merdle did that he was never at home.

At last he met the chief butler, the sight of which splendid retainer always finished him. Extinguished by this great creature, he sneaked to his dressing-room, and there remained shut up until he rode out to dinner, with Mrs. Merdle, in her own handsome chariot. At dinner, he was envied and flattered as a being of might, was Treasured, Barred, and Bishoped, as much as he would; and an hour after midnight came home alone, and being instantly put out again in his own hall, like a rushlight, by the chief butler, went sighing to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SHOAL OF BARNACLES.

MR. HENRY GOWAN and the dog were established frequenters of the cottage, and the day was fixed for the wedding. There was to be a convocation of Barnacles on the occasion; in order that that very high and very large family might shed as much lustre on the marriage, as so dim an event was capable of receiving.

To have got the whole Barnacle family together, would have been impossible for two reasons. Firstly, because no building could have held all the members and connections of that illustrious house. Secondly, because wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation, under the sun or moon, with a public post upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle. No intrepid navigator could plant a flag-staff upon any spot of earth, and take possession of it in the British name, but to that spot of earth, so soon as the discovery was known, the Circumlocution Office sent out a Barnacle and a despatch-box. Thus the Barnacles were all over the world, in every direction — despatch-boxing the compass.

But, while the so-potent art of Prospero himself would have failed in summoning the Barnacles from every speck of ocean and dry land on which there was nothing (except mischief) to be done, and anything to be pock-

eted, it was perfectly feasible to assemble a good many Barnacles. This, Mrs. Gowan applied herself to do; calling on Mr. Meagles frequently, with new additions to the list, and holding conferences with that gentleman when he was not engaged (as he generally was at this period) in examining and paying the debts of his future son-in-law, in the apartment of the scales and scoop.

One marriage guest there was, in reference to whose presence Mr. Meagles felt a nearer interest and concern than in the attendance of the most elevated Barnacle expected; though he was far from insensible of the honor of having such company. This guest was Clennam. But, Clennam had made a promise he held sacred, among the trees that summer night, and, in the chivalry of his heart, regarded it as binding him to many implied obligations. In forgetfulness of himself, and delicate service to her on all occasions, he was never to fail; to begin it, he answered Mr. Meagles cheerfully, "I shall come, of course."

His partner, Daniel Doyce, was something of a stumbling-block in Mr. Meagles's way, the worthy gentleman being not at all clear in his own anxious mind but that the mingling of Daniel with official Barnacleism might produce some explosive combination, even at a marriage breakfast. The national offender, however, lightened him of his uneasiness by coming down to Twickenham to represent that he begged, with the freedom of an old friend, and as a favor to one, that he might not be invited. "For," said he, "as my business with this set of gentlemen was to do a public duty and a public service, and as their business with me was to prevent it by wearing my soul out, I think we had better not eat and drink together with a show of being of one mind." Mr. Meagles

was much amused by his friend's oddity ; and patronized him with a more protecting air of allowance than usual, when he rejoined : " Well, well, Dan, you shall have your own crotchety way."

To Mr. Henry Gowan, as the time approached, Clennam tried to convey by all quiet and unpretending means, that he was frankly and disinterestedly desirous of tendering him any friendship he would accept. Mr Gowan treated him in return with his usual ease, and with his usual show of confidence, which was no confidence at all.

" You see, Clennam," he happened to remark in the course of conversation one day, when they were walking near the Cottage within a week of the marriage. " I am a disappointed man. That, you know already."

" Upon my word," said Clennam, a little embarrassed, " I scarcely know how."

" Why," returned Gowan. " I belong to a clan, or a clique, or a family, or a connection, or whatever you like to call it, that might have provided for me in any one of fifty ways, and that took it into its head not to do it at all. So here I am, a poor devil of an artist."

Clennam was beginning, " But on the other hand — " when Gowan took him up.

" Yes, yes, I know. I have the good fortune of being beloved by a beautiful and charming girl whom I love with all my heart."

(" Is there much of it ? " Clennam thought. And as he thought it, felt ashamed of himself.)

" And of finding a father-in-law who is a capital fellow and a liberal good old boy. Still, I had other prospects washed and combed into my childish head when it was washed and combed for me, and I took them to a public

school when I washed and combed it for myself, and I am here without them, and thus I am a disappointed man."

Clennam thought (and as he thought it, again felt ashamed of himself), was this notion of being disappointed in life, an assertion of station which the bridegroom brought into the family as his property, having already carried it detrimentally into his pursuit? And was it a hopeful or a promising thing anywhere?

"Not bitterly disappointed, I think," he said aloud.

"Hang it, no; not bitterly," laughed Gowan. "My people are not worth that — though they are charming fellows, and I have the greatest affection for them. Besides, it's pleasant to show them that I can do without them, and that they may all go to the Devil. And besides again, most men are disappointed in life, somehow or other, and influenced by their disappointment. But it's a dear good world, and I love it!"

"It lies fair before you now," said Arthur.

"Fair as this summer river," cried the other, with enthusiasm, "and by Jove I glow with admiration of it, and with ardor to run a race in it. It's the best of old worlds! And my calling! The best of old callings, isn't it?"

"Full of interest and ambition, I conceive," said Clennam.

"And imposition," added Gowan, laughing; "we won't leave out the imposition. I hope I may not break down in that; but there, my being a disappointed man may show itself. I may not be able to face it out gravely enough. Between you and me, I think there is some danger of my being just enough soured not to be able to do that."

"To do what?" asked Clennam.

"To keep it up. To help myself in my turn, as the man before me helps himself in his, and pass the bottle of smoke. To keep up the pretence as to labor, and study, and patience, and being devoted to my art, and giving up many solitary days to it, and abandoning many pleasures for it, and living in it, and all the rest of it — in short to pass the bottle of smoke, according to rule."

"But it is well for a man to respect his own vocation, whatever it is; and to think himself bound to uphold it, and to claim for it the respect it deserves; is it not?" Arthur reasoned. "And your vocation, Gowan, may really demand this suit and service. I confess I should have thought that all Art did."

"What a good fellow you are, Clennam!" exclaimed the other, stopping to look at him, as if with irrepressible admiration. "What a capital fellow! *You* have never been disappointed. That's easy to see."

It would have been so cruel if he had meant it, that Clennam firmly resolved to believe he did not mean it. Gowan, without pausing, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and laughingly and lightly went on:

"Clennam, I don't like to dispel your generous visions, and I would give any money (if I had any) to live in such a rose-colored mist. But what I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it, for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus. Now here's one of the advantages or disadvantages, of knowing a disappointed man. You hear the truth."

Whatever he had heard, and whether it deserved that name or another, it sank into Clennam's mind. It so

took root there, that he began to fear Henry Gowan would always be a trouble to him, and that so far he had gained little or nothing from the dismissal of Nobody, with all his inconsistencies, anxieties, and contradictions. He found a contest still always going on in his breast, between his promise to keep Gowan in none but good aspects before the mind of Mr. Meagles, and his enforced observation of Gowan in aspects that had no good in them. Nor could he quite support his own conscientious nature against misgivings that he distorted and discolored him, by reminding himself that he never sought those discoveries, and that he would have avoided them with willingness and great relief. For, he never could forget what had been; and he knew that he had once disliked Gowan, for no better reason than that he had come in his way.

Harassed by these thoughts, he now began to wish the marriage over, Gowan and his young wife gone, and himself left to fulfil his promise, and discharge the generous function he had accepted. This last week was, in truth, an uneasy interval for the whole house. Before Pet, or before Gowan, Mr. Meagles was radiant; but, Clennam had more than once found him alone, with his view of the scales and scoop much blurred, and had often seen him look after the lovers, in the garden or elsewhere when he was not seen by them, with the old clouded face on which Gowan had fallen like a shadow. In the arrangement of the house for the great occasion, many little reminders of the old travels of the father and mother and daughter had to be disturbed, and passed from hand to hand; and sometimes, in the midst of these mute witnesses to the life they had had together, even Pet herself would yield to lamenting and weeping. Mrs.

Meagles, the blithest and busiest of mothers, went about singing and cheering everybody; but she, honest soul, had her flights into store-rooms, where she would cry until her eyes were red, and would then come out, attributing that appearance to pickled onions and pepper, and singing clearer than ever. Mrs. Tickit, finding no balsam for a wounded mind in Buchan's Domestic Medicine, suffered greatly from low spirits, and from moving recollections of Minnie's infancy. When the latter were powerful with her, she usually sent up secret messages importing that she was not in parlor condition as to her attire, and that she solicited a sight of "her child" in the kitchen; there, she would bless her child's face, and bless her child's heart, and hug her child, in a medley of tears and congratulations, chopping-boards, rolling-pins, and pie-crust, with the tenderness of an attached old servant, which is a very pretty tenderness indeed.

But, all days come that are to be; and the marriage-day was to be, and it came; and with it came all the Barnacles who were bidden to the feast.

There was Mr. Tite Barnacle, from the Circumlocution Office and Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, with the expensive Mrs. Tite Barnacle *née* Stiltstalking, who made the Quarter Days so long in coming, and the three expensive Miss Tite Barnacles, double-loaded with accomplishments and ready to go off, and yet not going off with the sharpness of flash and bang that might have been expected, but rather hanging fire. There was Barnacle Junior, also from the Circumlocution Office, leaving the Tonnage of the country, which he was somehow supposed to take under his protection, to look after itself, and, sooth to say, not at all impairing the efficiency of his protection by leaving it alone. There was the engaging

Young Barnacle, deriving from the sprightly side of the family, also from the Circumlocution Office, gayly and agreeably helping the occasion along, and treating it, in his sparkling way, as one of the official forms and fees of the Church Department of How not to do it. There were three other Young Barnacles, from three other offices, insipid to all the senses, and terribly in want of seasoning, doing the marriage as they would have "done" the Nile, Old Rome, the new singer, or Jerusalem.

But, there was greater game than this. There was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself, in the odor of Circumlocution — with the very smell of Despatch-Boxes upon him. Yes, there was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, who had risen to official heights on the wings of one indignant idea, and that was, My Lords, that I am yet to be told that it behoves a Minister of this free country to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. That was, in other words, that this great statesman was always yet to be told that it behoved the Pilot of the ship to do anything but prosper in the private loaf and fish trade ashore, the crew being able, by dint of hard pumping, to keep the ship above water without him. On this sublime discovery, in the great art How not to do it, Lord Decimus had long sustained the highest glory of the Barnacle family; and let any ill-advised member of either House but try How to do it, by bringing in a Bill to do it, that Bill was as good as dead and buried when Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle rose up in his place, and solemnly said, soaring into indignant majesty as the Circumlocution cheering soared around him, that he was yet to be told, My Lords, that it behoved him as the Minister of this

free country, to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. The discovery of this Behoving Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion. It never wore out, though it was always going round and round in all the State Departments.

And there, with his noble friend and relative Lord Decimus, was William Barnacle, who had made the ever-famous coalition with Tudor Stiltstalking, and who always kept ready his own particular recipe for How not to do it; sometimes tapping the Speaker, and drawing it fresh out of him, with a "First, I will beg you, sir, to inform the House what Precedent we have for the course into which the honorable gentleman would precipitate us;" sometimes asking the honorable gentleman to favor him with his own version of the Precedent; sometimes telling the honorable gentleman that he (William Barnacle) would search for a Precedent; and oftentimes crushing the honorable gentleman flat on the spot, by telling him there was no Precedent. But, Precedent and Precipitate were, under all circumstances, the well-matched pair of battle-horses of this able Circumlocutionist. No matter that the unhappy honorable gentleman had been trying in vain, for twenty-five years, to precipitate William Barnacle into this — William Barnacle still put it to the House, and (at second-hand or so) to the country, whether he was to be precipitated into this. No matter that it was utterly irreconcilable with the nature of things and course of events, that the wretched honorable gentleman could possibly produce a Precedent for this — William Barnacle would nevertheless thank the honorable gentleman for that ironical cheer, and would close with him

upon that issue, and would tell him to his teeth that there was no Precedent for this. It might perhaps have been objected that the William Barnacle wisdom was not high wisdom, or the earth it bamboozled would never have been made, or, if made in a rash mistake, would have remained blank mad. But, Precedent and Precipitate together frightened all objection out of most people.

And there, too, was another Barnacle, a lively one, who had leaped through twenty places in quick succession, and was always in two or three at once, and who was the much-respected inventor of an art which he practised with great success and admiration in all Barnacle Governments. This was, when he was asked a Parliamentary question on any one topic, to return an answer on any other. It had done immense service, and brought him into high esteem with the Circumlocution Office.

And there too was a sprinkling of less distinguished Parliamentary Barnacles, who had not as yet got anything snug, and who were going through their probation to prove their worthiness. These Barnacles perched upon staircases and hid in passages, waiting their orders to make houses or not to make houses; and they did all their bearing, and ohing, and cheering, and barking, under directions from the heads of the family; and they put dummy motions on the paper in the way of other men's motions, and they stalled disagreeable subjects off until late in the night and late in the session, and then with virtuous patriotism cried out that it was too late; and they went down into the country, whenever they were sent, and swore that Lord Declinus had revived trade from a swoon and commerce from a fit, and had doubled the harvest of corn, quadrupled the harvest of hay,

and prevented no end of gold flying out of the Bank. Also these Barnacles were dealt, by the heads of the family, like so many cards below the court-cards, to public meetings and dinners; where they bore testimony to all sorts of services on the part of their noble and honorable relatives, and buttered the Barnacles on all sorts of toasts. And they stood, under similar orders, at all sorts of elections; and they turned out of their own seats, on the shortest notice and the most unreasonable terms, to let in other men; and they fetched and carried, and toadied and jobbed, and corrupted, and ate heaps of dirt, and were indefatigable in the public service. And there was not a list, in all the Circumlocution Office, of places that might fall vacant anywhere within half a century, from a lord of the Treasury to a Chinese consul, and up again to a governor-general of India, but, as applicants for such places, the names of some or of every one of these hungry and adhesive Barnacles were down.

It was necessarily but a sprinkling of any class of Barnacles that attended the marriage, for there were not two score in all, and what is that subtracted from Legion! But, the sprinkling was a swarm in the Twickenham cottage, and filled it. A Barnacle (assisted by a Barnacle) married the happy pair, and it behoved Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself to conduct Mrs. Meagles to breakfast.

The entertainment was not as agreeable and natural as it might have been. Mr. Meagles, hove down by his good company while he highly appreciated it, was not himself. Mrs. Gowan was herself, and that did not improve him. The fiction that it was not Mr. Meagles who had stood in the way, but that it was the Family greatness, and that the Family greatness had made a concession,

and there was now a soothing unanimity, pervaded the affair, though it was never openly expressed. Then the Barnacles felt that they for their parts would have done with the Meaglesses, when the present patronizing occasion was over ; and the Meaglesses felt the same for their parts. Then Gowan asserting his rights as a disappointed man who had his grudge against the family, and who perhaps had allowed his mother to have them there, as much in the hope that it might give them some annoyance as with any other benevolent object, aired his pencil and his poverty ostentatiously before them, and told them he hoped in time to settle a crust of bread and cheese on his wife, and that he begged such of them as (more fortunate than himself) came in for any good thing, and could buy a picture, to please to remember the poor painter. Then Lord Decimus, who was a wonder on his own Parliamentary pedestal, turned out to be the windiest creature here : proposing happiness to the bride and bridegroom in a series of platitudes, that would have made the hair of any sincere disciple and believer stand on end : and trotting, with the complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences which he seemed to take for high roads, and never so much as wanted to get out of. Then Mr. Tite Barnacle could not but feel that there was a person in company, who would have disturbed his life-long sitting to Sir Thomas Lawrence in full official character, if such disturbance had been possible : while Barnacle Junior did, with indignation, communicate to two vapid young gentlemen his relatives, that there was a feller here, look here, who had come to our Department without an appointment and said he wanted to know, you know ; and that, look here, if he was to break out now, as he might you know (for

you never could tell what an ungentlemanly Radical of that sort would be up to next), and was to say, look here, that he wanted to know this moment, you know, that would be Jolly; wouldn't it?

The pleasantest part of the occasion, by far, to Clennam, was the painfulest. When Mr. and Mrs. Meagles at last hung about Pet, in the room with the two pictures (where the company were not), before going with her to the threshold which she could never re-cross to be the old Pet and the old delight, nothing could be more natural and simple than the three were. Gowan himself was touched, and answered Mr. Meagles's "O Gowan, take care of her, take care of her!" with an earnest "Don't be so broken-hearted, sir. By Heaven I will!"

And so, with last sobs and last loving words, and a last look to Clennam of confidence in his promise, Pet fell back in the carriage, and her husband waved his hand, and they were away for Dover. Though not until the faithful Mrs. Tickit, in her silk gown and jet-black curls, had rushed out from some hiding-place, and thrown both her shoes after the carriage; an apparition which occasioned great surprise to the distinguished company at the windows.

The said company being now relieved from further attendance, and the chief Barnacles being rather hurried (for they had it in hand just then to send a mail or two, which was in danger of going straight to its destination, beating about the seas like the Flying Dutchman, and to arrange with complexity for the stoppage of a good deal of important business otherwise in peril of being done), went their several ways; with all affability conveying to Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, that general assurance that what they had been doing there, they had been doing at a sacri-

fice for Mr. and Mrs. Meagles's good, which they always conveyed to Mr. John Bull in their official condescension to that most unfortunate creature.

A miserable blank remained in the house, and in the hearts of the father and mother and Clennam. Mr. Meagles called only one remembrance to his aid, that really did him good.

"It's very gratifying, Arthur," he said, "after all, to look back upon."

"The past?" said Clennam.

"Yes — but I mean the company."

It had made him much more low and unhappy at the time, but now it really did him good. "It's very gratifying," he said, often repeating the remark in the course of the evening. "Such high company!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT WAS BEHIND MR. PANCKS ON LITTLE DORRIT'S
HAND.

It was at this time, that Mr. Pancks, in discharge of his compact with Clennam, revealed to him the whole of his gypsy story, and told him Little Dorrit's fortune. Her father was heir-at-law to a great estate that had long lain unknown of, unclaimed, and accumulating. His right was now clear, nothing interposed in his way, the Marshalsea gates stood open, the Marshalsea walls were down, a few flourishes of his pen and he was extremely rich.

In his tracking out of the claim to its complete establishment, Mr. Pancks had shown a sagacity that nothing could baffle, and a patience and secrecy that nothing could tire. "I little thought, sir," said Pancks, "when you and I crossed Smithfield that night, and I told you what sort of a Collector I was, that this would come of it. I little thought, sir, when I told you you were not of the Clennams of Cornwall, that I was ever going to tell you who *were* of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire." He then went on to detail, How, having that name recorded in his note-book, he was first attracted by the name alone. How, having often found two exactly similar names, even belonging to the same place, to involve no traceable consanguinity, near or distant, he did not at first give much

heed to this; except in the way of speculation as to what a surprising change would be made in the condition of a little seamstress, if she could be shown to have any interest in so large a property. How he rather supposed himself to have pursued the idea into its next degree, because there was something uncommon in the quiet little seamstress, which pleased him, and provoked his curiosity. How he had felt his way inch by inch, and "Moled it out, sir" (that was Mr. Pancks's expression), grain by grain. How, in the beginning of the labor described by this new verb, and to render which the more expressive Mr. Pancks shut his eyes in pronouncing it and shook his hair over them, he had alternated from sudden lights and hopes to sudden darkness and no hopes, and back again, and back again. How he had made acquaintances in the Prison, expressly that he might come and go there as all other comers and goers did; and how his first ray of light was unconsciously given him by Mr. Dorrit himself, and by his son: to both of whom he easily became known; with both of whom he talked much, casually ("but always Moleing you'll observe," said Mr. Pancks); and from whom he derived, without being at all suspected, two or three little points of family history which, as he began to hold clues of his own, suggested others. How it had at length become plain to Mr. Pancks, that he had made a real discovery of the heir-at-law to a great fortune, and that his discovery had but to be ripened to legal fulness and perfection. How he had, thereupon, sworn his landlord, Mr. Rugg, to secrecy in a solemn manner, and taken him into Moleing partnership. How they had employed John Chivery as their sole clerk and agent, seeing to whom he was devoted. And how, until the present hour, when

authorities mighty in the Bank and learned in the law declared their successful labors ended, they had confided in no other human being.

"So if the whole thing had broken down, sir," concluded Pancks, "at the very last, say the day before the other day when I showed you our papers in the Prison yard, or say that very day, nobody but ourselves would have been cruelly disappointed, or a penny the worse."

Clennam, who had been almost incessantly shaking hands with him throughout the narrative, was reminded by this to say, in an amazement which even the preparation he had had for the main disclosure scarcely smoothed down, "My dear Mr. Pancks, this must have cost you a great sum of money."

"Pretty well, sir," said the triumphant Pancks. "No trifle, though we did it as cheap as it could be done. And the outlay was a difficulty, let me tell you."

"A difficulty!" repeated Clennam. "But the difficulties you have so wonderfully conquered in the whole business!" shaking his hand again.

"I'll tell you how I did it," said the delighted Pancks, putting his hair into a condition as elevated as himself. "First, I spent all I had of my own. That wasn't much."

"I am sorry for it," said Clennam; "not that it matters now, though. Then, what did you do?"

"Then," answered Pancks, "I borrowed a sum of my proprietor."

"Of Mr. Casby?" said Clennam. "He's a fine old fellow."

"Noble old boy; a'n't he?" said Mr. Pancks, entering on a series of the dryest of snorts. "Generous old buck. Confiding old boy. Philanthropic old buck.

Benevolent old boy! Twenty per cent. I engaged to pay him, sir. But we never do business for less, at our shop."

Arthur felt an awkward consciousness of having, in his exultant condition, been a little premature.

"I said to that — boiling-over old Christian," Mr. Pancks pursued, appearing greatly to relish this descriptive epithet, "that I had got a little project on hand; a hopeful one; I told him a hopeful one; which wanted a certain small capital. I proposed to him to lend me the money on my note. Which he did, at twenty; sticking the twenty on in a business-like way, and putting it into the note, to look like a part of the principal. If I had broken down after that, I should have been his grubber for the next seven years at half wages and double grind. But he's a perfect Patriarch; and it would do a man good to serve him on such terms — on any terms."

Arthur for his life could not have said with confidence whether Pancks really thought so or not.

"When that was gone, sir," resumed Pancks, "and it did go, though I dribbled it out like so much blood, I had taken Mr. Rugg into the secret. I proposed to borrow of Mr. Rugg (or of Miss Rugg; it's the same thing; she made a little money by a speculation in the Common Pleas once). He lent it at ten, and thought that pretty high. But Mr. Rugg's a red-haired man, sir, and gets his hair cut. And as to the crown of his hat, it's high. And as to the brim of his hat, it's narrow. And there's no more benevolence bubbling out of him, than out of a ninepin."

"Your own recompense for all this, Mr. Pancks," said Clennam, "ought to be a large one."

"I don't mistrust getting it, sir," said Pancks. "I have made no bargain. I owed you one on that score ; now, I have paid it. Money out of pocket made good, time fairly allowed for, and Mr. Rugg's bill settled, a thousand pounds will be a fortune to me. That matter I place in your hands. I authorize you, now, to break all this to the family in any way you think best. Miss Amy Dorrit will be with Mrs. Finching this morning. The sooner done the better. Can't be done too soon."

This conversation took place in Clennam's bedroom, while he was yet in bed. For, Mr. Pancks had knocked up the house and made his way in, very early in the morning ; and, without once sitting down or standing still, had delivered himself of the whole of his details (illustrated with a variety of documents) at the bedside. He now said he would "go and look up Mr. Rugg," from whom his excited state of mind appeared to require another back ; and bundling up his papers, and exchanging one more hearty shake of the hand with Clennam, he went at full speed down-stairs, and steamed off.

Clennam, of course, resolved to go direct to Mr. Casby's. He dressed and got out so quickly, that he found himself at the corner of the patriarchal street nearly an hour before her time ; but he was not sorry to have the opportunity of calming himself with a leisurely walk.

When he returned to the street, and had knocked at the bright brass knocker, he was informed that she had come, and was shown up-stairs to Flora's breakfast-room. Little Dorrit was not there herself, but Flora was, and testified the greatest amazement at seeing him.

"Good gracious, Arthur — Doyce and Clennam !"

cried that lady, "who would have ever thought of seeing such a sight as this and pray excuse a wrapper for upon my word I really never and a faded check too which is worse but our little friend is making me a, not that I need mind mentioning to you for you must know there are such things a skirt, and having arranged that a trying on should take place after breakfast is the reason though I wish not so badly starched."

"I ought to make an apology," said Arthur, "for so early and abrupt a visit; but you will excuse it when I tell you the cause."

"In times forever fled Arthur," returned Mrs. Finching, "pray excuse me Doyce and Clennam infinitely more correct and though unquestionably distant still 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view, at least I don't mean that and if I did I suppose it would depend considerably on the nature of the view, but I'm running on again and you put it all out of my head."

She glanced at him tenderly, and resumed:

"In times forever fled I was going to say it would have sounded strange indeed for Arthur Clennam—Doyce and Clennam naturally quite different—to make apologies for coming here at any time, but that is past and what is past can never be recalled except in his own case as poor Mr. F said when he was in spirits Cucumber and therefore never ate it."

She was making the tea when Arthur came in, and now hastily finished that operation.

"Papa," she said, all mystery and whisper, as she shut down the tea-pot lid, "is sitting prosingly breaking his new-laid egg in the back parlor over the City article exactly like the Woodpecker Tapping and need never know that you are here, and our little friend you are

well aware may be fully trusted when she comes down from cutting out on the large table overhead."

Arthur then told her, in the fewest words, that it was their little friend he came to see; and what he had to announce to their little friend. At which astounding intelligence, Flora clasped her hands, fell into a tremble, and shed tears of sympathy and pleasure, like the good-natured creature she really was.

"For gracious sake let me get out of the way first," said Flora, putting her hands to her ears, and moving towards the door, "or I know I shall go off dead and screaming and make everybody worse, and the dear little thing only this morning looking so nice and neat and good and yet so poor and now a fortune is she really and deserves it too! and might I mention it to Mr. F's Aunt Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once or if objectionable not on any account."

Arthur nodded his free permission, since Flora shut out all verbal communication. Flora nodded in return to thank him, and hurried out of the room.

Little Dorrit's step was already on the stairs, and in another moment she was at the door. Do what he would to compose his face, he could not convey so much of an ordinary expression into it, but that the moment she saw it she dropped her work, and cried "Mr. Clennam! What's the matter!"

"Nothing, nothing. That is, no misfortune has happened. I have come to tell you something, but it is a piece of great good-fortune."

"Good-fortune?"

"Wonderful fortune!"

They stood in a window, and her eyes, full of light, were fixed upon his face. He put an arm about her,

seeing her likely to sink down. She put a hand upon that arm, partly to rest upon it, and partly so to preserve their relative positions as that her intent look at him should be shaken by no change of attitude in either of them. Her lips seemed to repeat "Wonderful fortune?" He repeated it again, aloud.

"Dear Little Dorrit! Your father."

The ice of the pale face broke at the word, and little lights and shoots of expression passed all over it. They were all expressions of pain. Her breath was faint and hurried. Her heart beat fast. He would have clasped the little figure closer, but he saw that the eyes appealed to him not to be moved.

"Your father can be free within this week. He does not know it; we must go to him from here, to tell him of it. Your father will be free within a few days. Your father will be free within a few hours. Remember, we must go to him, from here, to tell him of it!"

That brought her back. Her eyes were closing, but they opened again.

"This is not all the good-fortune. This is not all the wonderful good-fortune, my dear Little Dorrit. Shall I tell you more?"

Her lips shaped "Yes."

"Your father will be no beggar when he is free. He will want for nothing. Shall I tell you more? Remember! He knows nothing of it; we must go to him, from here, to tell him of it?"

She seemed to entreat him for a little time. He held her in his arm, and, after a pause, bent down his ear to listen.

"Did you ask me to go on?"

"Yes."

"He will be a rich man. He is a rich man. A great sum of money is waiting to be paid over to him as his inheritance ; you are all henceforth very wealthy. Bravest and best of children, I thank Heaven that you are rewarded !"

As he kissed her, she turned her head towards his shoulder, and raised her arm towards his neck ; cried out "Father ! Father ! Father !" and swooned away.

Upon which, Flora returned to take care of her, and hovered about her on a sofa, intermingling kind offices and incoherent scraps of conversation in a manner so confounding, that whether she pressed the Marshalsea to take a spoonful of unclaimed dividends, for it would do her good ; or whether she congratulated Little Dorrit's father on coming into possession of a hundred thousand smelling-bottles ; or whether she explained that she put seventy-five thousand drops of spirits of lavender on fifty thousand pounds of lump sugar, and that she entreated Little Dorrit to take that gentle restorative ; or whether she bathed the foreheads of Doyce and Clennam in vinegar, and gave the late Mr. F more air ; no one with any sense of responsibility could have undertaken to decide. A tributary stream of confusion, moreover, poured in from an adjoining bedroom, where Mr. F's Aunt appeared, from the sound of her voice, to be in a horizontal posture, awaiting her breakfast ; and from which bower that inexorable lady snapped off short taunts, whenever she could get a hearing, as, "Don't believe it's his doing !" and "He needn't take no credit to himself for it !" and "It'll be long enough, I expect, afore he'll give up any of his own money !" all designed to disparage Clennam's share in the discovery, and to relieve those inveterate feelings with which Mr. F's Aunt regarded him.

But, Little Dorrit's solicitude to get to her father, and to carry the joyful tidings to him, and not to leave him in his jail a moment with this happiness in store for him and still unknown to him, did more for her speedy restoration than all the skill and attention on earth could have done. "Come with me to my dear father. Pray come and tell my dear father!" were the first words she said. Her father, her father. She spoke of nothing but him, thought of nothing but him. Kneeling down and pouring out her thankfulness with uplifted hands, her thanks were for her father.

Flora's tenderness was quite overcome by this, and she launched out among the cups and saucers into a wonderful flow of tears and speech.

"I declare," she sobbed, "I never was so cut up since your mamma and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr. F's last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child's affection though very painful for all parties and Mr. F a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine-trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must you know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon teaspoons, mightn't it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavor is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you'd rather not why no my dear P'd rather not but still I do it as a duty, everybody will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and

many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you than from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so good-by darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall ! ”

Thus Flora, in taking leave of her favorite. Little Dorrit thanked her, and embraced her, over and over again ; and finally came out of the house with Clennam, and took coach for the Marshalsea.

It was a strangely unreal ride through the old squalid streets, with a sensation of being raised out of them, into an airy world of wealth and grandeur. When Arthur told her that she would soon ride in her own carriage through very different scenes, when all the familiar experiences would have vanished away, she looked frightened. But, when he substituted her father for herself, and told her how he would ride in his carriage, and how great and grand he would be, her tears of joy and innocent pride fell fast. Seeing that the happiness her mind could realize was all shining upon him, Arthur kept that single figure before her ; and so they rode brightly through the poor streets in the prison neighborhood, to carry him the great news.

When Mr. Chivery, who was on duty, admitted them into the Lodge, he saw something in their faces which filled him with astonishment. He stood looking after them, when they hurried into the prison, as though he

perceived that they had come back accompanied by a ghost a-piece. Two or three Collegians whom they passed, looked after them too, and presently joining Mr. Chivery, formed a little group on the Lodge steps, in the midst of which there spontaneously originated a whisper that the Father was going to get his discharge. Within a few minutes it was heard in the remotest room in the College.

Little Dorrit opened the door from without, and they both entered. He was sitting in his old gray gown, and his old black cap, in the sunlight by the window, reading his newspaper. His glasses were in his hand, and he had just looked round; surprised at first, no doubt, by her step upon the stairs, not expecting her until night; surprised again, by seeing Arthur Clennam in her company. As they came in, the same unwonted look in both of them which had already caught attention in the yard below, struck him. He did not rise or speak, but laid down his glasses and his newspaper on the table beside him, and looked at them with his mouth a little open, and his lips trembling. When Arthur put out his hand, he touched it, but not with his usual state; and then he turned to his daughter, who had sat down close beside him with her hands upon his shoulder, and looked attentively in her face.

"Father! I have been made so happy this morning!"

"You have been made so happy, my dear?"

"By Mr. Clennam, father. He brought me such joyful and wonderful intelligence about you! If he had not, with his great kindness and gentleness, prepared me for it, father — prepared me for it, father — I think I could not have borne it."

Her agitation was exceedingly great, and the tears

rolled down her face. He put his hand suddenly to his heart, and looked at Clennam.

"Compose yourself, sir," said Clennam, "and take a little time to think. To think of the brightest and most fortunate accidents of life. We have all heard of great surprises of joy. They are not at an end, sir. They are rare, but not at an end."

"Mr. Clennam? Not at an end? Not at an end for —" He touched himself upon the breast, instead of saying "me."

"No," returned Clennam.

"What surprise," he asked, keeping his left hand over his heart, and there stopping in his speech, while with his right hand he put his glasses exactly level on the table: "what such surprise can be in store for me?"

"Let me answer with another question. Tell me, Mr. Dorrit, what surprise would be the most unlooked for and the most acceptable to you. Do not be afraid to imagine it, or to say what it would be."

He looked steadfastly at Clennam, and, so looking at him, seemed to change into a very old haggard man. The sun was bright upon the wall beyond the window, and on the spikes at top. He slowly stretched out the hand that had been upon his heart, and pointed at the wall.

"It is down," said Clennam. "Gone!"

He remained in the same attitude, looking steadfastly at him.

"And in its place," said Clennam, slowly and distinctly, "are the means to possess and enjoy the utmost that they have so long shut out. Mr. Dorrit, there is not the smallest doubt that within a few days you will be free, and highly prosperous. I congratulate you with all

my soul on this change of fortune, and on the happy future into which you are soon to carry the treasure you have been blest with here — the best of all the riches you can have elsewhere — the treasure at your side."

With those words, he pressed his hand and released it; and his daughter, laying her face against his, encircled him in the hour of his prosperity with her arms, as she had in the long years of his adversity encircled him with her love and toil and truth; and poured out her full heart in gratitude, hope, joy, blissful ecstasy, and all for him.

"I shall see him, as I never saw him yet. I shall see my dear love, with the dark cloud cleared away. I shall see him, as my poor mother saw him long ago. O my dear, my dear! O father, father! O thank God, thank God!"

He yielded himself to her kisses and caresses, but did not return them, except that he put an arm about her. Neither did he say one word. His steadfast look was now divided between her and Clennam, and he began to shake as if he were very cold. Explaining to Little Dorrit that he would run to the coffee-house for a bottle of wine, Arthur fetched it with all the haste he could use. While it was being brought from the cellar to the bar, a number of excited people asked him what had happened; when he hurriedly informed them, that Mr. Dorrit had succeeded to a fortune.

On coming back with the wine in his hand, he found that she had placed her father in his easy-chair, and had loosened his shirt and neckcloth. They filled a tumbler with wine, and held it to his lips. When he had swallowed a little, he took the glass himself and emptied it.

Soon after that, he leaned back in his chair and cried, with his handkerchief before his face.

After this had lasted a while, Clennam thought it a good season for diverting his attention from the main surprise, by relating its details. Slowly, therefore, and in a quiet tone of voice, he explained them as he best could, and enlarged on the nature of Pancks's service.

"He shall be — ha — he shall be handsomely recompensed, sir," said the Father, starting up and moving hurriedly about the room. "Assure yourself, Mr. Clennam, that everybody concerned shall be — ha — shall be nobly rewarded. No one, my dear sir, shall say that he has an unsatisfied claim against me. I shall repay the — hum — the advances I have had from you, sir, with peculiar pleasure. I beg to be informed at your early convenience, what advances you have made my son."

He had no purpose in going about the room, but he was not still a moment.

"Everybody," he said, "shall be remembered. I will not go away from here in anybody's debt. All the people who have been — ha — well behaved towards myself and my family, shall be rewarded. Chivery shall be rewarded. Young John shall be rewarded. I particularly wish, and intend, to act munificently, Mr. Clennam."

"Will you allow me," said Arthur, laying his purse on the table, "to supply any present contingencies, Mr. Dorrit? I thought it best to bring a sum of money for the purpose."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. I accept with readiness, at the present moment, what I could not an hour ago have conscientiously taken. I am obliged to you for the temporary accommodation. Exceedingly temporary, but well timed — well timed." His hand had closed upon

the money, and he carried it about with him. "Be so kind, sir, as to add the amount to those former advances to which I have already referred; being careful, if you please, not to omit advances made to my son. A mere verbal statement of the gross amount is all I shall — ha — all I shall require."

His eye fell upon his daughter at this point, and he stopped for a moment to kiss her, and to pat her head.

"It will be necessary to find a milliner, my love, and to make a speedy and complete change in your very plain dress. Something must be done with Maggy too, who at present is — ha — barely respectable, barely respectable. And your sister, Amy, and your brother. And my brother, your uncle — poor soul, I trust this will rouse him — messengers must be despatched to fetch them. They must be informed of this. We must break it to them cautiously, but they must be informed directly. We owe it as a duty to them, and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let them — hum — not to let them do anything."

This was the first intimation he had ever given, that he was privy to the fact that they did something for a livelihood.

He was still jogging about the room, with the purse clutched in his hand, when a great cheering arose in the yard. "The news has spread already," said Clennam, looking down from the window. "Will you show yourself to them, Mr. Dorrit? They are very earnest, and they evidently wish it."

"I — hum — ha — I confess I could have desired, Amy my dear," he said, jogging about in a more feverish flutter than before, "to have made some change in my dress first, and to have bought a — hum — a watch and

chain. But if it must be done as it is, it — ha — it must be done. Fasten the collar of my shirt, my dear. Mr. Clennam, would you oblige me — hum — with a blue neckcloth you will find in that drawer at your elbow. Button my coat across at the chest, my love. It looks — ha — it looks broader, buttoned.”

With his trembling hand he pushed his gray hair up, and then, taking Clennam and his daughter for supporters, appeared at the window leaning on an arm of each. The Collegians cheered him very heartily, and he kissed his hand to them with great urbanity and protection. When he withdrew into the room again, he said “Poor creatures!” in a tone of much pity for their miserable condition.

Little Dorrit was deeply anxious that he should lie down to compose himself. On Arthur's speaking to her of his going to inform Pancks that he might now appear as soon as he would, and pursue the joyful business to its close, she entreated him in a whisper to stay with her, until her father should be quite calm and at rest. He needed no second entreaty; and she prepared her father's bed, and begged him to lie down. For another half hour or more he would be persuaded to do nothing but go about the room, discussing with himself the probabilities for and against the Marshal's allowing the whole of the prisoners to go to the windows of the official residence which commanded the street, to see himself and family depart forever in a carriage — which, he said, he thought would be a Sight for them. But, gradually, he began to droop and tire, and at last stretched himself upon the bed.

She took her faithful place beside him, fanning him and cooling his forehead; and he seemed to be falling

asleep (always with the money in his hand), when he unexpectedly sat up and said :

"Mr. Clennam, I beg your pardon. Am I to understand, my dear sir, that I could — ha — could pass through the Lodge at this moment, and — hum — take a walk?"

"I think not, Mr. Dorrit," was the unwilling reply. "There are certain forms to be completed; and although your detention here is now in itself a form, I fear it is one that for a little longer has to be observed too."

At this he shed tears again.

"It is but a few hours, sir," Clennam cheerfully urged upon him.

"A few hours, sir," he returned in a sudden passion. "You talk very easily of hours, sir! How long do you suppose, sir, that an hour is to a man who is choking for want of air?"

It was his last demonstration for that time; as, after shedding some more tears and querulously complaining that he couldn't breathe, he slowly fell into a slumber. Clennam had abundant occupation for his thoughts, as he sat in the quiet room watching the father on his bed, and the daughter fanning his face.

Little Dorrit had been thinking too. After softly putting his gray hair aside, and touching his forehead with her lips, she looked towards Arthur, who came nearer to her, and pursued in a low whisper the subject of her thoughts.

"Mr. Clennam, will he pay all his debts before he leaves here?"

"No doubt. All."

"All the debts for which he has been imprisoned here, all my life and longer?"

"No doubt."

There was something of uncertainty and remonstrance in her look; something that was not all satisfaction. He wondered to detect it, and said:

"You are glad that he should do so?"

"Are you?" asked Little Dorrit, wistfully.

"Am I? Most heartily glad!"

"Then I know I ought to be."

"And are you not?"

"It seems to me hard," said Little Dorrit, "that he should have lost so many years and suffered so much, and at last pay all the debts as well. It seems to me hard that he should pay in life and money both."

"My dear child—" Clennam was beginning.

"Yes, I know I am wrong," she pleaded timidly, "don't think any worse of me; it has grown up with me here."

The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her.

He thought this, and forebore to say another word. With the thought, her purity and goodness came before him in their brightest light. The little spot made them the more beautiful.

Worn out with her own emotions, and yielding to the silence of the room, her hand slowly slackened and failed in its fanning movement, and her head dropped down on the pillow at her father's side. Clennam rose softly, opened and closed the door without a sound, and passed from the prison, carrying the quiet with him into the turbulent streets.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MARSHALSEA BECOMES AN ORPHAN.

AND now the day arrived, when Mr. Dorrit and his family were to leave the prison forever, and the stones of its much-trodden pavement were to know them no more.

The interval had been short, but he had greatly complained of its length, and had been imperious with Mr. Rugg touching the delay. He had been high with Mr. Rugg, and had threatened to employ some one else. He had requested Mr. Rugg not to presume upon the place in which he found him, but to do his duty, sir, and to do it with promptitude. He had told Mr. Rugg that he knew what lawyers and agents were, and that he would not submit to imposition. On that gentleman's humbly representing that he exerted himself to the utmost, Miss Fanny was very short with him; desiring to know what less he could do, when he had been told a dozen times that money was no object, and expressing her suspicion that he forgot whom he talked to.

Towards the Marshal, who was a Marshal of many years' standing, and with whom he had never had any previous difference, Mr. Dorrit comported himself with severity. That officer, on personally tendering his congratulations, offered the free use of two rooms in his house for Mr. Dorrit's occupation until his departure.

Mr. Dorrit thanked him at the moment, and replied that he would think of it; but the Marshal was no sooner gone than he sat down and wrote him a cutting note, in which he remarked that he had never on any former occasion had the honor of receiving his congratulations (which was true, though indeed there had not been anything particular to congratulate him upon), and that he begged, on behalf of himself and family, to repudiate the Marshal's offer, with all those thanks which its disinterested character and its perfect independence of all worldly considerations demanded.

Although his brother showed so dim a glimmering of interest in their altered fortunes, that it was very doubtful whether he understood them, Mr. Dorrit caused him to be measured for new raiment by the hosiers, tailors, hatters, and bootmakers whom he called in for himself; and ordered that his old clothes should be taken from him and burned. Miss Fanny and Mr. Tip required no direction in making an appearance of great fashion and elegance; and the three passed this interval together at the best hotel in the neighborhood — though truly, as Miss Fanny said, the best was very indifferent. In connection with that establishment, Mr. Tip hired a cabriolet, horse, and groom, a very neat turn-out, which was usually to be observed for two or three hours at a time, gracing the Borough High Street, outside the Marshalsea courtyard. A modest little hired chariot and pair was also frequently to be seen there; in alighting from and entering which vehicle, Miss Fanny fluttered the Marshal's daughters by the display of inaccessible bonnets.

A great deal of business was transacted in this short period. Among other items, Messrs. Peddle and Pool,

solicitors, of Monument Yard, were instructed by their client Edward Dorrit, Esquire, to address a letter to Mr. Arthur Clennam, enclosing the sum of twenty-four pounds nine shillings and eightpence, being the amount of principal and interest computed at the rate of five per cent. per annum, in which their client believed himself to be indebted to Mr. Clennam. In making this communication and remittance, Messrs. Peddle and Pool were further instructed by their client to remind Mr. Clennam, that the favor of the advance now repaid (including gate-fees) had not been asked of him, and to inform him that it would not have been accepted if it had been openly proffered in his name. With which they requested a stamped receipt, and remained his obedient servants. A great deal of business had likewise to be done, within the so-soon-to-be-orphaned Marshalsea, by Mr. Dorrit so long its Father, chiefly arising out of applications made to him by Collegians for small sums of money. To these he responded with the greatest liberality, and with no lack of formality; always first writing to appoint a time at which the applicant might wait upon him in his room, and then receiving him in the midst of a vast accumulation of documents, and accompanying his donation (for he said in every such case, "it is a donation, not a loan") with a great deal of good counsel: to the effect that he, the expiring Father of the Marshalsea, hoped to be long remembered, as an example that a man might preserve his own and the general respect even there.

The Collegians were not envious. Besides that they had a personal and traditional regard for a Collegian of so many years' standing, the event was creditable to the College, and made it famous in the newspapers. Per-

haps more of them thought, too, than were quite aware of it, that the thing might in the lottery of chances have happened to themselves, or that something of the sort might yet happen to themselves, some day or other. They took it very well. A few were low at the thought of being left behind, and being left poor; but even these did not grudge the family their brilliant reverse. There might have been much more envy in politer places. It seems probable that mediocrity of fortune would have been disposed to be less magnanimous than the Collegians, who lived from hand to mouth — from the pawnbroker's hand to the day's dinner.

They got up an address to him, which they presented in a neat frame and glass (though it was not afterwards displayed in the family mansion or preserved among the family papers); and to which he returned a gracious answer. In that document he assured them, in a Royal manner, that he received the profession of their attachment with a full conviction of its sincerity; and again generally exhorted them to follow his example — which, at least in so far as coming into a great property was concerned, there is no doubt they would have gladly imitated. He took the same occasion of inviting them to a comprehensive entertainment, to be given to the whole College in the yard, and at which he signified he would have the honor of taking a parting glass to the health and happiness of all those whom he was about to leave behind.

He did not in person dine at this public repast (it took place at two in the afternoon, and his dinners now came in from the hotel at six), but his son was so good as to take the head of the principal table, and to be very free and engaging. He himself went about among the com-

pany, and took notice of individuals, and saw that the viands were of the quality he had ordered, and that all were served. On the whole, he was like a baron of the olden time, in a rare good humor. At the conclusion of the repast, he pledged his guests in a bumper of old Madeira ; and told them that he hoped they had enjoyed themselves, and what was more, that they would enjoy themselves for the rest of the evening ; that he wished them well ; and that he bade them welcome. His health being drunk with acclamations, he was not so baronial after all but that in trying to return thanks he broke down, in the manner of a mere serf with a heart in his breast, and wept before them all. After this great success, which he supposed to be a failure, he gave them " Mr. Chivery and his brother officers ;" whom he had beforehand presented with ten pounds each, and who were all in attendance. Mr. Chivery spoke to the toast, saying, What you undertake to lock up, lock up ; but remember that you are, in the words of the fettered African, a man and a brother ever. The list of toasts disposed of, Mr. Dorrit urbanely went through the motions of playing a game at skittles with the Collegian who was the next oldest inhabitant to himself ; and left the tenantry to their diversions.

But, all these occurrences preceded the final day. And now the day arrived when he and his family were to leave the prison forever, and when the stones of its much trodden pavement were to know them no more.

Noon was the hour appointed for the departure. As it approached, there was not a Collegian within doors, nor a turnkey absent. The latter class of gentlemen appeared in their Sunday clothes, and the greater part of the Collegians were brightened up as much as circum-

stances allowed. Two or three flags were even displayed, and the children put on odds and ends of ribbon. Mr. Dorrit himself, at this trying time, preserved a serious but graceful dignity. Much of his attention was given to his brother, as to whose bearing on the great occasion he felt anxious.

"My dear Frederick," said he, "if you will give me your arm, we will pass among our friends together. I think it is right that we should go out arm in arm, my dear Frederick."

"Hah!" said Frederick. "Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"And if, my dear Frederick, — if you could, without putting any great restraint upon yourself, throw a little (pray excuse me, Frederick), a little polish into your usual demeanor —"

"William, William," said the other, shaking his head, "it's for you to do all that. I don't know how. All forgotten, forgotten!"

"But, my dear fellow," returned William, "for that very reason, if for no other, you must positively try to rouse yourself. What you have forgotten you must now begin to recall, my dear Frederick. Your position —"

"Eh?" said Frederick.

"Your position, my dear Frederick."

"Mine?" He looked first at his own figure, and then at his brother's, and then, drawing a long breath, cried, "Hah, to be sure! Yes, yes, yes."

"Your position, my dear Frederick, is now a fine one. Your position as my brother is a very fine one. And I know that it belongs to your conscientious nature, to try to become worthy of it, my dear Frederick, and to try to adorn it. To be no discredit to it, but to adorn it."

"William," said the other weakly, and with a sigh, "I

will do anything you wish, my brother, provided it lies in my power. Pray be so kind as to recollect what a limited power mine is. What would you wish me to do to-day, brother? Say what it is, only say what it is."

"My dearest Frederick, nothing. It is not worth troubling so good a heart as yours with."

"Pray trouble it," returned the other. "It finds it no trouble, William, to do anything it can for you."

William passed his hand across his eyes, and murmured with august satisfaction, "Blessings on your attachment, my poor dear fellow!" Then he said aloud, "Well, my dear Frederick, if you will only try, as we walk out, to show that you are alive to the occasion—that you think about it—"

"What would you advise me to think about it?" returned his submissive brother.

"Oh! my dear Frederick, how can I answer you? I can only say what, in leaving these good people, I think myself."

"That's it!" cried his brother. "That will help me."

"I find that I think, my dear Frederick, and with mixed emotions in which a softened compassion predominates, What will they do without me!"

"True," returned his brother. "Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'll think that as we go. What will they do without my brother! Poor things! What will they do without him!"

Twelve o'clock having just struck, and the carriage being reported ready in the outer courtyard, the brothers proceeded down-stairs arm-in-arm. Edward Dorrit, Esquire (once Tip), and his sister Fanny followed, also arm-in-arm; Mr. Plornish and Maggy, to whom had been intrusted the removal of such of the family effects

as were considered worth removing, followed, bearing bundles and burdens to be packed in a cart.

In the yard, were the Collegians and turnkeys. In the yard, were Mr. Pancks and Mr. Rugg, come to see the last touch given to their work. In the yard, was Young John making a new epitaph for himself, on the occasion of his dying of a broken heart. In the yard, was the Patriarchal Casby, looking so tremendously benevolent that many enthusiastic Collegians grasped him fervently by the hand, and the wives and female relatives of many more Collegians kissed his hand, nothing doubting that he had done it all. In the yard, was the usual chorus of people proper to such a place. In the yard, was the man with the shadowy grievance respecting the Fund which the Marshal embezzled, who had got up at five in the morning to complete the copying of a perfectly unintelligible history of that transaction, which he had committed to Mr. Dorrit's care as a document of the last importance, calculated to stun the Government and effect the Marshal's downfall. In the yard, was the insolvent whose utmost energies were always set on getting into debt, who broke into prison with as much pains as other men have broken out of it, and who was always being cleared and complimented; while the insolvent at his elbow—a mere little, snivelling, striving tradesman, half dead of anxious efforts to keep out of debt—found it a hard matter, indeed, to get a Commissioner to release him with much reproof and reproach. In the yard, was the man of many children and many burdens, whose failure astonished everybody; in the yard, was the man of no children and large resources, whose failure astonished nobody. There, were the people who are always going out to-morrow, and

always putting it off; there, were the people who had come in yesterday, and who were much more jealous and resentful of this freak of fortune than the seasoned birds. There, were some who, in pure meanness of spirit, cringed and bowed before the enriched Collegian and his family; there, were others who did so really because their eyes, accustomed to the gloom of their imprisonment and poverty, could not support the light of such bright sunshine. There, were many whose shillings had gone into his pocket to buy him meat and drink; but none who were now obtrusively Hail fellow well met! with him, on the strength of that assistance. It was rather to be remarked of the caged birds, that they were a little shy of the bird about to be so grandly free, and that they had a tendency to withdraw themselves towards the bars, and seem a little fluttered as he passed.

Through these spectators, the little procession, headed by the two brothers, moved slowly to the gate. Mr. Dorrit, yielding to the vast speculation how the poor creatures were to get on without him, was great, and sad, but not absorbed. He patted children on the head like Sir Roger de Coverley going to church, he spoke to people in the background by their Christian names, he condescended to all present, and seemed for their consolation to walk encircled by the legend in golden characters, "Be comforted, my people! Bear it!"

At last three honest cheers announced that he had passed the gate, and that the Marshalsea was an orphan. Before they had ceased to ring in the echoes of the prison walls, the family had got into their carriage, and the attendant had the steps in his hand.

Then, and not before, "Good Gracious!" cried Miss Fanny all at once, "Where's Amy!"

Her father had thought she was with her sister. Her sister had thought she was "somewhere or other." They had all trusted to finding her, as they had always done, quietly in the right place at the right moment. This going away was perhaps the very first action of their joint lives that they had got through without her.

A minute might have been consumed in the ascertaining of these points, when Miss Fanny, who, from her seat in the carriage, commanded the long narrow passage leading to the Lodge, flushed indignantly.

"Now I do say, Pa," cried she, "that this is disgraceful!"

"What is disgraceful, Fanny?"

"I do say," she repeated, "this is perfectly infamous! Really almost enough, even at such a time as this, to make one wish one was dead! Here is that child Amy, in her ugly old shabby dress, which she was so obstinate about, Pa, which I over and over again begged and prayed her to change, and which she over and over again objected to, and promised to change to-day, saying she wished to wear it as long as ever she remained in there with you — which was absolutely romantic nonsense of the lowest kind — here is that child Amy disgracing us, to the last moment and at the last moment, by being carried out in that dress after all. And by that Mr. Clennam too!"

The offence was proved, as she delivered the indictment. Clennam appeared at the carriage-door, bearing the little insensible figure in his arms.

"She has been forgotten," he said, in a tone of pity not free from reproach. "I ran up to her room (which Mr. Chivery showed me), and found the door open, and that she had fainted on the floor, dear child. She ap-

peared to have gone to change her dress, and to have sunk down overpowered. It may have been the cheering, or it may have happened sooner. Take care of this poor cold hand, Miss Dorrit. Don't let it fall."

"Thank you, sir," returned Miss Dorrit, bursting into tears. "I believe I know what to do, if you'll give me leave. Dear Amy, open your eyes, that's a love! Oh, Amy, Amy, I really am so vexed and ashamed! Do rouse yourself, darling! Oh, why are they not driving on! Pray, Pa, do drive on!"

The attendant, getting between Clennam and the carriage-door, with a sharp "By your leave, sir!" bundled up the steps, and they drove away.

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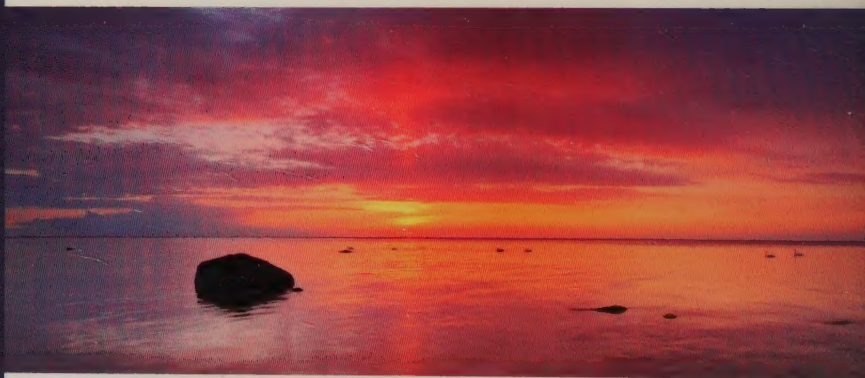
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